

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

April/May  
2014

# ANIMATION<sup>TM</sup> MAGAZINE

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## Log On &amp; Toon Up!

Our giveaway for this month is Disney's *The Pirate Fairy* on Blu-ray (courtesy of Disney, out April 1)

Visit

[www.animationmagazine.net](http://www.animationmagazine.net) to win!







Greetings!

Allow me to introduce myself: I'm Tom McLean and I'm the new editor of *Animation Magazine*!

Before I get going too far, I want to first take a moment and say a huge "Thank you!" to our outgoing editor, Ramin Zahed. I've known Ramin for many years and have, like many of you, greatly enjoyed having him as a colleague and a friend. He did a wonderful job guiding the magazine for more than a decade, and we wish him all the best in his new ventures.

Some of you will know me already. I worked here as the online news editor a few years back and have been contributing to the magazine as a freelance writer since 2006. I've written about animation for other outlets, too, including *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Deadline.com*'s *AwardsLine* supplements, among many others. I'm also an author, having written *Mutant Cinema: The X-Men Trilogy from Comics to Screen*, published in 2009 by Sequart. I've been a judge for the Will Eisner Comic Book Industry Awards, Comic-Con International Film Festival and have moderated and spoken on panels at everything from Book Expo America to New York Comic-Con and Screenwriting Expo.

I've been a fan of animation – as well as comics, visual effects and movies of all types – for as long as I can remember. It started back in the days when the only animation you could see was in a three-hour or so block every Saturday morning, or the occasional syndicated series that would air in those precious after-school hours. I never imagined that one day there would be so much animation to see everywhere, from the theaters to dozens of TV channels to an uncountable number of online venues.

And animation is truly everywhere. All you have to do is pay attention and you'll see animated content in almost every aspect of our media-saturated lives. It's on our phones, our computers, on our televisions and selling seats in theaters all over the world.

It's an amazing time to be writing about animation, and I'm very excited about bringing it to all our readers in the months ahead.

This issue, we have some particularly fun goodies, including our cover feature on Blue Sky Studios' *Rio 2* on page 12, a look at upcoming animated TV series including *Clarence* (p. 20) and *TripTank* (p. 22), and we delve into the wider world of the business side of things with our 11 hot shows to watch for at MIPTV (p. 26), preview of *Cartoons on the Bay* (p. 32), report on the state of animation in Turkey (p. 34) and take a look at the exploding animation scene in the U.K. (p. 34).

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, and I'm sure you'll want to stick with us in the months ahead. I also would love to hear from you, our readers. What do you like about the magazine? What do you dislike? What type of articles do you like to read or would like to see included in the magazine?

Thanks so much for your continued support of *Animation Magazine*. Enjoy this issue, and we'll see you back here again next time.

Tom

Tom McLean  
Editor  
tom@animationmagazine.net

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"I think once people got to Disney, it was kind of like a cold wake-up call, that maybe it wasn't everything it was cracked up to be. It was like being groomed to be eaten by cannibals. The company wanted to stretch out and try different things and hire new people, but they were still kind of stuck in the past."

– Tim Burton, on first going to work at Disney after CalArts



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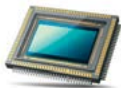




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# 'Frozen,' 'Gravity' Take Top VFX and Toon Oscars ...

It was a big night for *Frozen* at the 86th annual Academy Awards, as the smash-hit CG musical became the first Disney feature to win the Best Animated Oscar since the category was inaugurated in 2001.

Directed by Jennifer Lee, who also wrote the screenplay, and Chris Buck, the movie also took home the Best Original Song trophy. "Let It Go," as performed by Idina Menzel, offered not only one of the highlights of the March 2 ceremony, but also created an instant meme when John Travolta fumbled her introduction by calling her "Adele Menzeen." The honor also saw songwriter Robert Lopez, who wrote the song with his wife, Kristen Anderson-Lopez, become the youngest member of the EGOT club – winning an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony. The Best Animated Short category had heavily favored Disney's *Get A Horse* going into the ceremony, but the honor went to the French short *Mr. Hublot*. On the visual effects front, *Gravity* ran away with it, as expected. The win for visual effects supervisor Tim Webber, Chris Lawrence, David Shirk and Neil Corbould was one of seven wins for the film for the night.

## FESTS AND EVENTS ... And It's the Same Story at the Visual Effects Society Awards

**Feb. 12:** Held slightly before the Oscars, the VES Awards this year were an excellent predictor.

*Frozen* won all four categories for which it was nominated, while *Gravity* dominated the effects side with six wins at the 12th annual ceremony.

The three-hour-plus ceremony, hosted by actor Patton Oswalt at the Beverly Hilton, yielded more winners than we can credit here, so head over to <http://bit.ly/1hEmNZ7> for the full list.



Peter Del Veche, Jennifer Lee and Chris Buck accept the Oscar for Best Animated Feature for Disney's *Frozen* at the 86th annual Academy Awards, held March 2 at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. *Frozen* is the first Disney feature to win the category.

## FESTS AND EVENTS 'Minuscule' Tops Tributes at 2014 Cartoon Movie

**March 13:** Half a world away, the film *Minuscule* earned the top honor of director of the year at the 2014 Cartoon Movie Tributes for Thomas Szabo and Hélène Giraud.

The winners were presented with a Cartoon Movie Tributes trophy to symbolize the professional recognition from their peers.

France's *Le Pacte* won Distributor of the Year, while Belgium's *Walking the Dog* won Producer of the Year.

Taking home the Rhone-Alpes Personality of the Year honor was Jacques-Rémy Girerd of Folimage.



## TV Nickelodeon Unveils Toon-Heavy Programming Slate for 2014-15

**Feb. 25:** Nickelodeon announced a programming slate for 2014-15 that includes new animated series, re-ups of viewer favorites and the acclaimed Animated Shorts Program. Highlights included:

- *Bad Seeds* (26 episodes) Created, written and directed by C.H. Greenblatt (*Chowder*)
- *Pig Goat Banana Cricket* (26 eps.) Created by Dave Cooper (also art director) and J. Ryan, who co-writes with executive producer David Sacks (*The Simpsons*, *Regular Show*). The pilot was directed by indie animator Nick Cross.
- *Welcome to the Wayne* (6 eps.) Created and written by Billy Lopez (*The Wonder Pets!*)

Viewers can also expect new episodes of hit toons including *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Sanjay and Craig*, *Breadwinners*, *Rabbids* and *The Fairly OddParents*.



## INTERNET

### Disney Interactive, Google Launch 'Blank' Animated Short

**Feb. 11:** Disney Interactive teamed up with Google to launch a new animated short film titled *Blank: A Vinylmation Love Story*. The 38-minute video was available exclusively via Google Play, both online and through the Google Play app for Android or iPhone, through Feb. 23.

Based on the popular Disney Parks Vinylmation collectible franchise, *Blank: A Vinylmation Love Story* is a stop-motion animated film that tells the story of an unpainted Vinylmation figure on an epic adventure through an original new world to find his lost soul mate.



For its third year, Nickelodeon's global Animated Shorts Program has selected 10 domestic and seven international projects from over 1,000 submitted pitches, which will be developed into shorts that will air on Nickelodeon and be featured on nick.com and on the Nick App this year. Domestic projects include *The Loud House* by Chris Savino, *Bear Wrestler* by Deanna Rooney, *By Request Pizza* by Arica Tuesday & Mick Ignis, *Hole* by Sam Spina, *Matt and Gus* by Matt Braunger, *Charlie and Mr. Two* by Travis Braun, *Bug Salad* by Carl Faruolo, *Earmouse and Bottle* by Brian Morante, *Woodstump* by Zach Smith and *Broats* by Jack Cusumano.

International projects in development include *Badly Drawn Animals* by Hamish Steele (U.K.), *Louis and Georges* by Renaud Martin & Raphael Chabassol (France), *Monster Pack* by Pedro Eboli & Graham Peterson (Brazil/Canada), *Moosebox* by Mike Scott (South Africa), *Scoop* by The Brothers McLeod (U.K.), *Tech Oddity* by Marco Ibarra & Stefie Zohrer (Mexico) and *Tonk's Island* by Mel Roach (Australia).

## FESTS AND EVENTS

### Art Show Offers Early Look at Reel FX's Upcoming 'Book of Life'

**Feb. 26:** 20th Century Fox hosted a private art show in Beverly Hills to show off art from *The Book of Life*, an animated feature film in production at Reel FX Creative Studios in Dallas and scheduled for release in October.

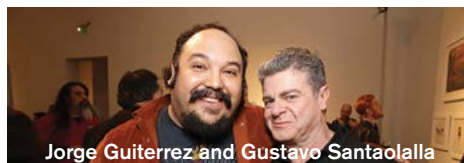
The event, held at Ace Gallery in Beverly Hills, featured an extensive look at concept art, paintings and sketches that were key in developing the look of the film.

Writer and director Jorge Gutierrez was on hand to talk briefly about the film, a comedy following a young man named Manolo, who is torn between fulfilling the expectations of his family and following his heart. Before choosing which path to follow, he embarks on an incredible adventure that spans three fantastical worlds where he must face his greatest fears.

The film, which is being done in CG and will emulate a stop-motion look, is heavily inspired by Latino art in general and the Day of the Dead celebration in particular.

Gutierrez introduced a pair of live musical performances from Gustavo Santaolalla, who won Oscars for his work on the scores to *Brokeback Mountain* and *Babel*. Santaolalla's originals will be complemented by Latin-style covers of popular rock songs.

Gutierrez also played a short video welcome from Guillermo del Toro, who is producing the film.



## PASSINGS

**Jimmy Murakami**, one of the founding fathers of Irish animation, died Feb. 16 after a brief illness. He was 80. Murakami played a key role in developing Ireland's animation industry and directed numerous award-winning shorts and features, including *When the Wind Blows* in 1986.

Legendary animator, producer and director **Arthur Rankin Jr.**, who delivered some of the most enduring and well-loved TV holiday specials of all time, has died at age 89. The acclaimed creator died Jan. 30 at his home in Bermuda, following an illness. Since the early 1960s, Rankin and his partner Jules Bass had created classic stop-motion animated specials like *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Frosty the Snowman*, *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town* and many other broadcast record-setting gems.

## FEATURES

### Sony Goes Fully Animated for 'Smurfs 3'; Kelly Asbury to Direct

**Feb. 27:** A lot of good tidbits can come out in earnings report calls. For example: Sony has confirmed it is putting a third *Smurfs* movie on the fast-track – and that the movie will be fully animated. Kelly Asbury, of *Gnomeo & Juliet* and *Shrek 2*, is directing.

The studio's two previous *Smurfs* films were hybrid affairs, mixing animation and live action. The first was a hit, grossing \$143 million domestic and \$563 million worldwide in 2011. The sequel, released last year, slipped significantly with \$71 million domestic and \$347 million worldwide. The third *Smurfs* film is due Aug. 14, 2015.

## INTERNET

### DreamWorks Animation, Netflix Announce Three New Series

**March 13:** DreamWorks Animation and Netflix announced the next three original animated kids' series in their partnership: *Puss in Boots*, *King Julien* and *Veggie Tales in the House*. The streaming content partners also revealed the premiere date for the second batch of episodes for *Turbo FAST* will be April 4.

The end of the year will see the arrival of *Madagascar* spin-off *King Julien* – starring the eponymous self-obsessed lemur; the *Shrek* universe's adorable and daring kitty sharing his nine lives worth of tales in *Puss in Boots*; and talking produce pals Bob the tomato and Larry the cucumber offering new recipes for faith-based values (and probably some very catchy tunes) in *Veggie Tales in the House*.



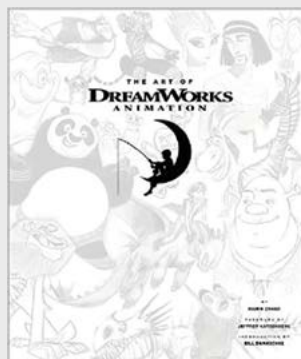
# Books We Love



## The Art of DreamWorks Animation by Ramin Zahed

[Abrams, \$50]

In celebration of the studio's 20th anniversary, DreamWorks Animation and Abrams Books have put together an unprecedented, behind-the-scenes journey through its archives. With former *Animag* editor Zahed to guide you, slip into this lushly illustrated guide to DreamWorks' achievements, from the hand-drawn *The Prince of Egypt* to the claymation of *Chicken Run* and on to the technology stepping stones of CG works *Antz*, *Shrek* and this year's *How to Train Your Dragon 2* and *Home*.

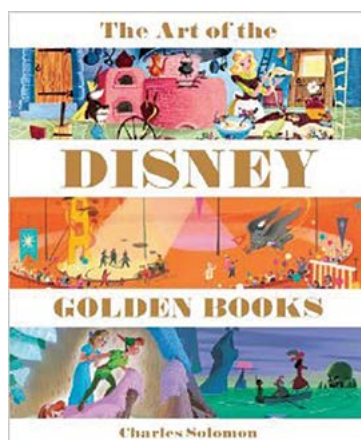


In addition to 325 pieces of concept art, character design and storyboards (in a 324-page book!), readers are treated to an inspiring foreword from CEO and co-founder Jeffrey Katzenberg, an insightful introduction from chief creative officer Bill Damaschke and running commentary full of insider perspectives, memories and observations from the artists and directors behind all of DreamWorks' 30 films to-date. To quote Damaschke, this is truly a "compendium of all that DreamWorks has been and all that it will be."

## The Art of the Disney Golden Books by Charles Solomon

[Disney Editions Deluxe, \$35]

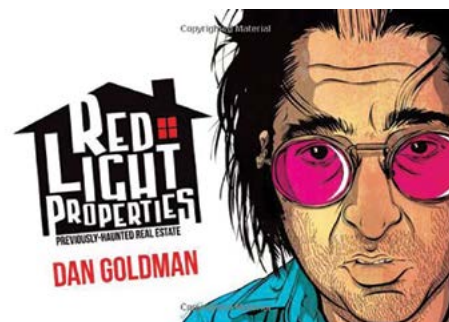
Animation critic and historian Solomon delves into the illustrated treasure trove of some of the world's most cherished and collected books – the gilded spines of which probably still gleam from many of our readers' bookcases. The inception of these classics occurred in 1933, and was born out of a game-changing partnership between Whitman Publishing and Walt Disney. From *Peter Pan* to *Tangled*, beloved Disney faces and places have been brought lovingly to the page by studio legends like Mary Blair, Alice and Martin Provensen, Gustaf Tenggren, Al Dempster, Retta Scott Worcester and Bill Peet. This 160-page love letter to the Golden Books would be a welcome addition to any Disneyphile's shelf.



## Red Light Properties by Dan Goldman

[IDW Publishing, \$19.99]

This is the first-ever print edition of Goldman's cult classic web-comic, which has won over readers with its blend of spine-tingling horror and out-

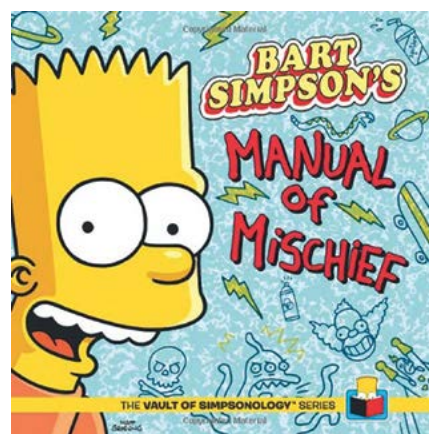


rageous slapstick humor. The questionable heroes of the story are Jude and Cecilia Tobin, a husband and wife real-estate team whose company, Red Light Properties, specializes in getting haunted houses off troubled owners' hands with their patented "urban shamanism." And while the customers usually end up happy, the Tobins' barely-on-speaking-terms marriage adds an extra level to the supernatural property-flipping adventures Goldman crafts with all his Eisner-worthy skill.

## Bart Simpson's Manual of Mischief by Matt Groening

[Insight Editions, \$24.99]

Ay caramba! The latest jewel retrieved from The Vault of Simpsonology promises to turn you from mild-mannered to mayhem-minded in a few flips of the page. Learn from the master of mischief such crucial skills as how to pack the perfect spy kit and the keys to annoyance, then admire the special inserts including bad-ass skateboard stickers, removable "Sneaky Hall of Fame" cards and an illustrated booklet on the art of the prank call. Or, you can eat my shorts.



— Mercedes Milligan



# Two Decades of Hellboy

Mike Mignola looks back on 20 years of his comic-book creation's unexpected success both on the page and on the screen. By Thomas J. McLean.

**W**hen Mike Mignola first created his comic-book character Hellboy — whose first comic series debuted 20 years ago with *Hellboy: Seeds of Destruction #1* — he had no assumptions that the character would make a second appearance, let alone still be around 20 years later. The artist, who lives in Manhattan Beach and continues to write and draw comics about Hellboy and the world he lives in, is as puzzled as anyone as to why the big red guy has been a hit in animation and two live-action movies. But he's also a guy who appears happy to have created something that, in his words, has managed to survive this long and inspire so many people.

**Animation Magazine: Why do you think this character and his world have struck such a chord and managed to survive all the ups and downs comics have been through in that time?**

**Mike Mignola:** I don't know. I just took everything I liked, crammed it into one place. I do think there is some intangible thing that happens when you can tell the creator just loves what he's doing. I see so many comics that are technically so well done but they're so boring to me because you can tell the guys are just doing a job. And I just love this world, so I poured a lot of me into this book. I certainly never thought this was a recipe for success, but from my perspective it does seem to be one of the things that separates *Hellboy* out from other things.

**What was your approach in selling this character or giving him over to other media to adapt? He's been pretty successful in other arenas, but it sounds like you were someone who was not actively looking for that, so how did that all come about?**

**Mignola:** I maybe would have stressed over it more if I thought there was ever any real possibility of anybody making a movie, but I knew nobody would ever make anything called *Hell-*

*boy*, so there wasn't a lot of stress. And then when I met Guillermo [del Toro] and we talked about what he wanted to do, I thought well this will be great but I'm not going to get my hopes up because there's still no way in hell he's go-



Mike Mignola

ing to be able to make a movie called *Hellboy* starring Ron Perlman. That's just never going to happen. So it makes it easy when you don't think it's going to happen. And then it happened.

**What did you think of the animated movies? Were they closer to your vision of the character?**

**Mignola:** When it came to animation, I knew this guy Tad Stones who had been at Disney who really was a big *Hellboy* fan and when we started talking about animation I said can you involve Tad Stones because he knows animation and he knows the character so I don't have to be in there trying to explain what this thing should be to somebody who is unfamiliar with it. Tad and I banged out the stories together, which was very fun and very easy, cause he knew the material and then I just kind of got out of the way. The third [animated] film, we would have learned a lot from the first two

films — not that I'm unhappy with the first two films, but I think we were going to hit our stride with the third one. We had come up with a plot that we were really happy with and had two films to look at and say let's do this and let's not do that, and then they pulled the plug. I'm a big fan of the unmade third film.

**Were there any particular animators who had an influence on your style?**

**Mignola:** Nothing consciously. The one thing, and I don't know that it comes from animation, but I'm very silhouette conscious, I'm very design conscious, and that comes from looking at stylized types of artwork, like animated stuff, rather than live-action stuff. So I'm always thinking, what's the silhouette of this character, what's the shape of this character, what's the readability of this character. As opposed to just a big rendered pile of realistic drapery and whatever else, so I do think I think a little bit like an animator without consciously being influenced by animation.

**What does the future hold for Hellboy?**

**Mignola:** He's going to remain dead, he's going to remain in hell. He's got a lot of work to do in hell because it turns out it's kind of a shitty place and if he stays there I guess he's gotta fix it. My original idea with *Hellboy in Hell* was it was a way for me to come back to drawing the book and draw this kind of fantasy world that I wanted to draw. And it was intended to be just a bunch of unrelated stories as Hellboy wanders around hell ... and what's happened is all those little unrelated stories have started fusing together into a big lump, so I find myself now telling a particular story where I have to jump Hellboy through X number of hoops to get to a certain place where I'm going. If I do manage to tell this particular story, then my hope is that I can then send Hellboy on vacation where he does just get to wander around this world where I adapt different folk tales, different fairy tales from different cultures and do it all in this kind of hell setting. That's my hope, that's my intention, but plans do tend to change. ♦





# April Planner

**1** Disney's **The Pirate Fairy**, **Dragon Ball Z: Season 3** and 1963 monster mash-up **King Kong vs. Godzilla** are out on disc today.



**Future Film Festival** in Bologna, Italy offers the



latest visual marvels, through April 6. (futurefilmfestival.org)

**4** Prepare for a patriotic action spectacle as Disney releases Marvel's **Captain America: The Winter Soldier**.



**5-10** Check out the latest in broadcast tech at **NAB Show** in Las Vegas. (nabshow.com)

**8** This week's DVD/Blu-ray options include **The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug**, **Sofia the First: The Floating Palace** and **Naruto Shippuden: Uncut Box Set 18**.



**7-10** Pack some comfortable shoes for the **MIPTV** content market in Cannes – you'll thank us later. (miptv.com)



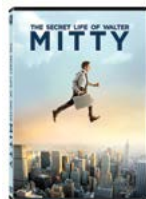
**Rio 2**, directed by Carlos Saldanha.

**13** Happy birthday to Disney Legend **Glen Keane**!



**14** **Akira** director **Katsuhiro Otomo** celebrates his 60th today.

**15** Opt for Toonbox's **The Nut Job**, **The Secret Life of Walter Mitty** or **One Piece: Collection 9** on disc.



**18** Johnny Depp stars as an artificial intelligence researcher whose activities set anti-technology extremists against him in Wally Pfister's **Transcendence**.



Sergio Aragones, Jim Lee and Katie Cook are among the special guests attending **WonderCon** in Anaheim, Calif., this weekend. (comic-con.org/wca)

**22-25** **FMX** offers panels and discussions with animation, vfx and gaming majors this week (fmx.de) in Stuttgart, where you can also catch the **Festival of Animated Film** through April 27. (itfs.de)

**FMX2014**



**29** The end of the month offers the **Space Battleship Yamato** movie, **Star Trek: Enterprise - Season Four** and **Betty Boop - The Essential Collection, Vol. 3** on DVD or Blu-ray.



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail [mercedes@animationmagazine.net](mailto:mercedes@animationmagazine.net).





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# Return to Rio

Director Carlos Saldanha and Blue Sky Studios fly Blu, Jewel and friends into the unknown territory of the Amazon in *Rio 2*. By Thomas J. McLean

For Carlos Saldanha, the 2011 animated feature film *Rio* was a passion project — one that was a love letter to the city he was born and raised in. That the quirky tale of Blu, a stuffy domesticated blue macaw parrot who can't fly and is forced to loosen up when a scientific trip to Rio de Janeiro goes awry, was a hit was an added bonus.

But not as much as the film's sequel, *Rio 2*, which allowed Saldanha and the team at Blue Sky Studios to revisit the world of Blu, Jewel and their new family in an all-new stereoscopic 3D adventure due in theaters April 11.

"There was so much more that I wanted to do in the first movie," says Saldanha, a native of Rio de Janeiro who came to the United States in the early 1990s to attend the School of Visual Arts in New York. "When you finish you have that feeling of, 'I could have done this,' and 'I could have done that.' And then this

one, it allows me to explore some of that."

No stranger to sequels, having shepherded Blue Sky's *Ice Age* franchise since co-directing the first installment, Saldanha says the challenge for *Rio 2* was to keep the story fresh and explore every aspect to take it to a new place.

"I think movies are about the journey of the characters and how you tell that story is how you keep it fresh," he says.

"That's what I try to do with my movies, is try to make sure that I keep what works for the personalities of the characters from the first one and advance them or just do new things with them and the new characters

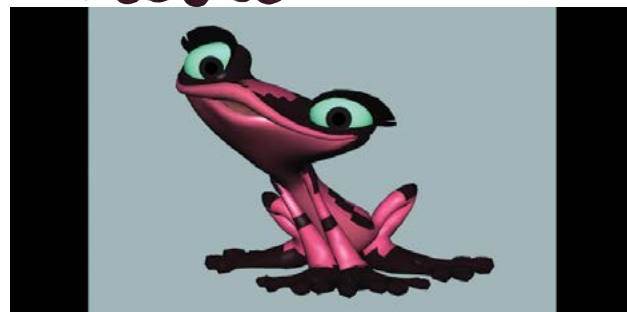
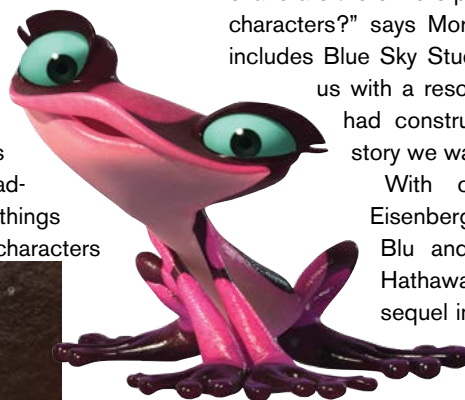
that come along."

Vanessa Morrison, president of Fox Animation, says that approach was very much in line with the studio's plans for a sequel. "After the success of the (first) movie, the question that Carlos had and that we had is: Are there more stories to tell with these characters? Are there more personal stories to tell with Blu and Jewel and are there more places to go with these characters?" says Morrison, whose purview includes Blue Sky Studios. "Carlos came to us with a resounding yes and really had constructed a vision of the story we wanted to tell."

With original leads Jesse Eisenberg returning to play Blu and Oscar-winner Anne Hathaway back as Jewel, the sequel introduces several new characters — most notably Jewel's



Creating Gabi started with a sketch (above), moved into a maquette (center), animation (lower right) and the final lighted version.





Anne Hathaway and Jesse Eisenberg return as Jewel and Blu for *Rio 2*, this time with three children who meet their grandfather (voiced by Andy Garcia). Below left, Blu's owner Linda (Leslie Mann) and bird preservationist Tulio (Rodrigo Santoro) follow Blu's trail, while Jewel meets her old friend Roberto (Bruno Mars), bottom right.



macho, traditional father Eduardo, played by Andy Garcia, and her childhood friend Roberto, voiced by music sensation Bruno Mars.

"I wanted a father who was very powerful and strong and intimidating and I felt that Andy always had that presence for me," Saldanha says.

For Roberto, finding the character was a process of discovery for both Saldanha and Mars. "It was a hard character to cast because I didn't quite have the character in mind," he says. "When I saw Bruno on *Saturday Night Live*, I looked at him and I thought he had so much energy. He was funny, he had pathos — he had all those things I wanted to bring to the character, so I said, 'Why not? Let's give it a shot!'"

Roberto makes a rather dramatic and funny musical entrance in the movie, an idea that to get right required a little improvisation from Mars. "We had a first session with him and we recorded the script pages and it was fun and we got it, but then I kept feeling we're missing something special," says Saldanha. "When we came back for the next session, we talked a little bit about why don't we try to add music

to you as a character, a musical introduction that's over the top and fun. And he was on board with it, he was ready to do it. And it took him an hour: He went outside, brainstormed a little bit and he sang that opening number and it was like his introduction and it was so funny."

The actors returning to their roles benefited from familiarity with the terrain, which allowed them to focus less on defining their characters and more on exploring their interactions with the story and each other.

The story pushes the main characters into different directions. Blu and Jewel, who were revealed to have become parents in the final moments of the first *Rio*, find their relationship challenged by being parents, meeting Jewel's family and the various dangers posed by their adventures in the Amazon.

Saldanha says those family dynamics create conflict between characters that is universally recognized. "It's territory that we are all very aware of," he says. "So it allows me to make the characters feel personable and allows you to create fun comedy at the same time."

Coming only three years after the first *Rio*

— "a fairly short period of time in animation terms," Saldanha says — there were no huge or obvious innovations in the technology or animation techniques used to bring the sequel to life. Most of the innovation came in advancements in lighting made on Blue Sky's previous feature film, *Epic*, and often are largely invisible in the finished product to most viewers.

"For example, for *Rio 2* we had to re-rig all the character again," Saldanha says. "We wanted the characters to be faster to animate. We wanted animators to have to spend less time having to move a point and spend that time acting for the characters. ... Even though it was time consuming in the beginning, it allowed us to improve the animation."

While the first *Rio* was set largely in the eponymous city itself, *Rio 2* ventures to new territory, heading west from Rio de Janeiro into the Amazon rainforest. It was a journey Saldanha himself had to take first. "I had never been to the Amazon, so I wanted to have that experience myself. I wanted to see what inspires me about the Amazon, how does it feel to be in the Amazon," he says.





The material was mostly personal reference for Saldanha, with the rest of the film's crew relying on the ample reference work in books, photos and movies of what the Amazon looks like and how light plays off its features. (That wasn't the only trip Saldanha took during the making of *Rio 2*. He also took three weeks vacation to shoot a short live-action segment for the *I Love Rio* project, and hopes to direct a live-action adaptation of the graphic novel *Rust* in the near future.)

The Amazon was the setting for some of the most complicated animation sequences in the film, including the reveal of the massive sanctuary for the blue macaws and a type of bird-style soccer match.

Saldanha says it was easier this time around to animate the birds. "With this one, we walked in knowing what we wanted to

do with it. So we spent all of our efforts just trying to come up with fun acting for them, trying to come up with better stuff that we can do with their bodies or their wings." Also like the first film, *Rio 2* is a stereoscopic 3D movie, though Saldanha says Blue Sky's pipeline now incorporates 3D into the process so well that problems are caught early on and the process is relatively routine.

With two films now complete, Saldanha says he would be happy to turn *Rio* into a trilogy if the opportunity presents itself. In the meantime, work is proceeding on his next animated Blue Sky feature, *Ferdinand*.

"I do hope this movie is successful and that people will enjoy it and if so, we'll deal with that when the time comes," he says. "If it happens, great. If not, I'm very proud of what we've done so far." ♦

## Shuffling the Beat

As with the first *Rio*, music plays a large part in *Rio 2*. Brazilian musical legend Sergio Mendes returns as executive music producer and collaborated with composer John Powell and musician Carlinhos Brown to give the movie what Saldanha calls "a triangle of trust."

Mendes says the sequel gave him a chance to show off Brazilian music. "They go to the Amazon but they travel through different parts of Brazil, so the story allowed us to really use the beautiful diversity of Brazilian music," he says.

Among the diverse musical contributors to *Rio 2* are R&B artist Janelle Monae, several Brazilian groups and Broadway legend Kristin Chenoweth, who gets her own complete musical number.

But Mendes says his favorite piece in the movie is one called "Batucada Familia." "It is the big celebration in the jungle and that song is very much the spirit of all the diversity," he says. "It's different rhythms, different melodies." ♦



Sergio Mendes



Vanessa Morrison

Carlos Saldanha



# JOY

## OF NATURE



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## Connecting to a Classic

DisneyToon's *The Pirate Fairy* steers the Tinker Bell franchise into familiar territory that closes the gap with its origins in 1953's *Peter Pan*. By Thomas J. McLean

**W**riter-director Peggy Holmes knew she wanted the sixth entry in Disney Toon Studios' Tinker Bell feature

series to be about a girl who runs away from home. But they were missing a way to turn that into an exciting and engaging story.

"We were actually sitting with (Walt Disney Animation Studios Chief Creative Officer) John Lasseter and the other directors and writers and talking about where can we go," she says. "And after about two hours, John all of the sudden pounds his fist on the table and we

all look up and he goes: 'Pirates! She could run into pirates!' And we all went, oh, gosh, what a big idea! And with pirates came the idea that we could introduce a young Captain Hook."

The path was then set for *The Pirate Fairy*,

due out on home media April 1, and the first movie in the series to steer clearly into the realm of Disney's 1953 classic *Peter Pan*.

ie Hollow only to return a year later leading a band of pirates that steals the source of pixie dust. That forces Tinker Bell and her friends to

try to stop her, a goal made more difficult by a mishap that switches their powers, and unites all the fairies against an unexpected but familiar foe.

A new character was necessary for telling this story, says Holmes, because none of the established Pixie Hollow characters worked as a runaway. "I don't think Tinker Bell would run away from home; Tinker Bell takes things head on,"

says Holmes. "I don't think it would be believable (for Tinker Bell to run away)."

Designing Zarina was one of the main challenges, says Raymond Shenusay, head of story on the movie. "She had to be a very human character up front, enough for us to



The film centers on a new fairy character named Zarina, voiced by *Mad Men* star Christina Hendricks: a slightly nonconformist pixie dust keeper who has unconventional ideas for using the magical substance. When one of her experiments backfires, she runs away from Pix-



be invested in her, but she also had to become a pirate and do some mean things to her friends," he says. "We needed a character who, despite the fact that she's six inches tall, you could believe that these pirates were taking orders from her."

The look of the character had to stand out as well. Character designer Ritsuko Notani says her first look in *Pixie Hollow* followed the general fairy esthetic – wearing all organic materials like leaves for clothes – but with tweaks to show her eccentricities, such as slightly unkempt hair and being just a little taller than the other fairies.

For her transformation into the Pirate Fairy, she gets a new costume including a pirate coat made from the cuff of a man's jacket, wild red hair and smoky eye makeup.

The young Captain James Hook was a particularly difficult character to handle because the reveal of who he is to become is a key plot point in the movie. That meant there had to be subtle hints to his identity without being obvious. Most of the movie sees him without his iconic hat, coat or mustache, but sharp eyes will catch details like the tiny ruffle on his shirt collar that foreshadows the full costume he comes to wear.

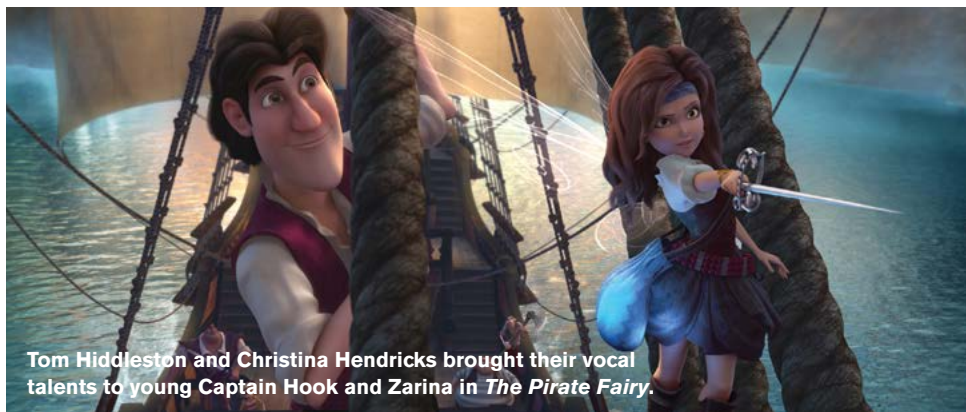
Inspiration was drawn from frequent trips to the Disney Animation Research Library to inspect the original artwork from *Peter Pan*.

*Avengers* star Tom Hiddleston voices the character, bringing a similar balance to his performance. "The original performance of Hook was by Hans Conried, and it's a big, over-the-top performance," says Holmes. "What Tom clearly understood was it was a believable performance for that era, and so he understood he had to find a huge performance here but believable for a contemporary audience. And he got that in spades."

The animators on the film looked frequently at reference material, some of it of the actors as they were recording their lines, says Yuriko Senoo, animation supervisor on the movie. "For Christina Hendricks, who did the voice of Zarina, we also looked at Keira Knightley from *Pirates of the Caribbean*," says Senoo. "But we mainly shot reference of ourselves to get the performance that we wanted."

The most difficult character to animate proved to be the baby crocodile. (Yes, this movie reveals how Hook's nemesis from *Peter Pan* got the ticking clock in his stomach.) Senoo says it was a technical challenge to animate a character that is so cartoony – occasionally walking on two legs and at other times on four.

Of the human characters, Senoo says the animators most enjoyed working on the pirates. "We could go broad and do dance and



Tom Hiddleston and Christina Hendricks brought their vocal talents to young Captain Hook and Zarina in *The Pirate Fairy*.



song," she says.

Environments also offered lots of opportunity for the feature, such as revisiting and getting a closer look at iconic locations from *Peter Pan*, says producer Jenni Magee-Cook. "We didn't have the interior of Skull Rock to go from, so we had to add to that," she says. "It's really subtle but if you look at the buildings inside there when the ship is docked on the inside, there's a building and a water wheel and a dock and if you really study it those are all ship parts."

The production also sent a crew to visit pi-

rate-like ships and take photographs from the perspective of the six-inch tall fairies using a 3-D camera.

Obviously, the makers of *The Pirate Fairy* were serious about honoring the past and paying attention to all the details opened up by its connection to *Peter Pan*. And, if you needed more proof, the ticking of the clock the baby croc swallows is the original sound from *Peter Pan*, pulled from the archives.

***The Pirate Fairy* is released on Blu-ray combo pack and Digital HD on April 1.**



# Adventures in the Forest City

Indie animator Jim Lujan and Cleveland hip-hop duo Kounterclockwise unite for *Forever-Land*. By Mercedes Milligan

Indie animator Jim Lujan has been busy lately. In addition to working on his hit webtoon *Sanjourno Must Die* for RugBurn, developing *MasterFreak Theater* for DirecTV and partnering with Bill Plympton on a new feature called *Revengeance*, the L.A.-based artist has completed a 56-minute movie, animated solo: *Kounterclockwise in Forever-Land*.

Set in a hidden dimension known as Forever-Land, the 2D film follows Kounterclockwise (Cleveland hip-hop artists Deacon Burns and Kaya Rogue) who are transported into this strange world to retrieve "The Glove," an item of cosmic importance that allows its wearer to "rule the funk." But in this alternate reality filled with strange characters and creatures, The Glove is in the clutches of despotic ruler Infinitus. Kounterclockwise will have to save the universe from Infinitus' grasp, restore the order of the funk — and rock the crowd while doing it.

Begun roughly a year ago, the film grew out of Lujan's work animating three music videos for the act. Burns had become a fan watching his cartoons online and gave Lujan carte blanche to create the videos. "It was kind of always in the back of our heads; after the second video, it just snowballed," says Lujan. "Their music is so spacey, I thought, I'm going to let their music take me to whatever world we need to get taken to."

What emerged was a fantastically bizarre sci-fi adventure, produced bit by bit with constant back and forth between the collaborators (who have still never met in person). Lujan would send drawings, scenes or requests for



dialogue recordings to Kounterclockwise, or they would send him beats and musical ideas to build on.

Music plays a large role in the film. "Basically, it's 99 percent original music," says Burns. "The only song we had recorded previously was 'Hide and Seek' ... We had wanted that song to be a video as well, but the idea basically got put into the movie." The song is heard when Kounterclockwise encounter the psychic Madame Mesmerelda, who reveals the existence of The Glove and the plight of Forever-Land, kicking off the whole adventure.

On his end, Lujan brought his trademark weirdness and humor to the hip-hop odyssey by drawing characters by hand and scanning them into Flash to be animated. The director notes a bit more than half of the film was creat-

ed this way, but over the production he became more comfortable with a new Wacom stylus system that gradually took over. The DIY filmmaker then edited the film in Apple's iMovie.

"When people ask me about getting into animation, I tell them, you're concerned about telling a good story," Lujan says. "Concentrate on the story and make the production process as simple as possible."

Another point of pride for the filmmakers is the way Burns' disability is treated. Burns, a "huge animation geek," broke his back in 2007, leaving him wheelchair bound. With Rogue's encouragement, he rededicated himself to his music and embraced his new way of living. "This movie features a person who's in a wheelchair, but it's not a sad 'oh, pity this poor guy' thing. You talk about equal representation, this is a perfect example because we don't even make an issue of it. Deacon is Deacon," Lujan explains.

Now, Lujan and Burns are focusing on getting *Forever-Land* as much exposure as possible through special screenings and the Internet. And Kounterclockwise is planning a tour that will include showing the film, performing its soundtrack and a special audience experience: "We're going to have the characters dressed up on stage, walking through the crowd ... it'll be like a hip-hop *Rocky Horror Picture Show*," says Burns.

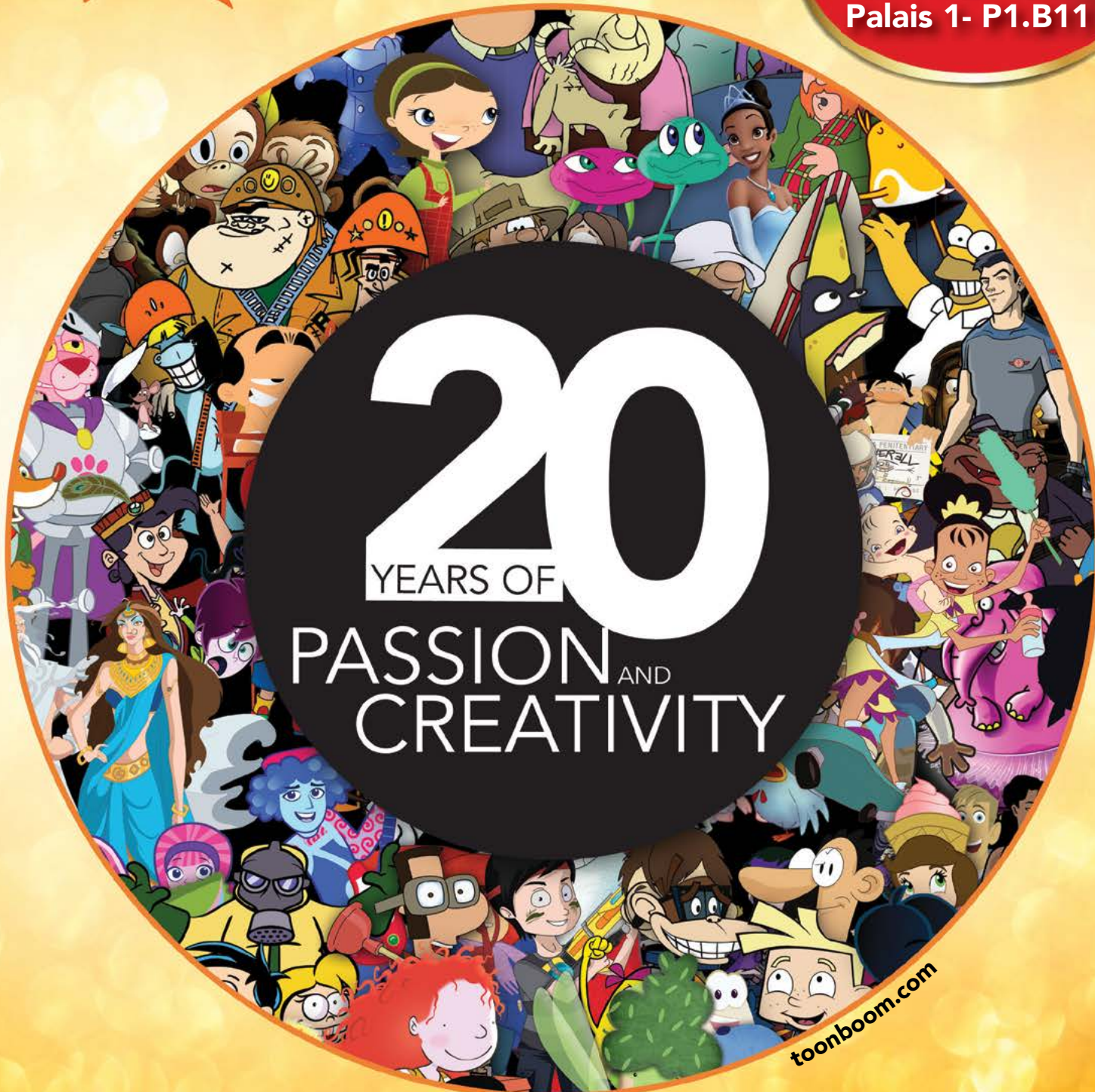
**Watch *Kounterclockwise in Forever-Land* at [forever-land.com](http://forever-land.com) and visit our website for an extended interview.**







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## CN's New Bundle of Joy

Creator Skyler Page and creative director Nelson Boles spread good vibes with their original series *Clarence*. By Mercedes Milligan

**W**ith the glut of fantasy-driven kids' content riding the airwaves the last few years, a cartoon centered on the ordinary adventures of a simple neighborhood kid would seem a breath of fresh suburban air. Meet Clarence, the lovable eternal optimist whose eponymous show is the latest 2D animated comedy to join Cartoon Network.

The series celebrates the joys of childhood without magical embellishment or talking animals. Whether Clarence and his buddies (over-cautious Jeff and unpredictable Sumo) are tackling epic dirt fights, awkward crushes, trampoline combat or prank-filled sleepovers, the gap-toothed hero finds wonder in everyday things.

"I think our show is pretty clearly striving to be realistic ... keyword 'striving,'" says first-time show creator Skyler Page, who also voices the main character. "It seemed like the market was pretty flooded with fantasy and random humor, and I remember a lot of shows when I was growing up that were more poignant, with more relatable situations ... real characters who can't use magic to get out of their problems. I felt like there was a need for that, and that was our focus driving the show."

The young artist was aided in developing *Clarence* by the show's creative director, Nelson Boles, whom he met while studying animation at CalArts. (The two bonded over a

shared love of *Ren & Stimpy* their first year.) They began developing the concept a while ago, but when Page landed a job at Cartoon Network and found out the studio was looking for ideas for its shorts program, it was full steam ahead. This turned into a pilot which earned the duo a greenlight – and a little more time to sharpen things up.

### The Amazing Ordinary!

From a two- or three-person crew polishing the pilot, Page – who previously worked in the storyboarding and writing departments for *Adventure Time* and *Secret Mountain Force Awesome* – now finds himself in command of a local team of 30 to 35 writers, storyboarders, designers, colorists and revisionists at Cartoon Network Studios. Animation service work for the show is done by Saerom in Korea. While Page and Boles are a bit harried by the production schedule to give accurate estimates, they guess the show order is about 60 percent finished.

Page points out that though *Clarence* is "the little taste of reality in a sea of fantasy," there's still room in the show for imagination. "Everyone gets tired of reality. We get enough of it in real life," he jokes. "So, there's some fantasy in our show, too. One thing I like is

we can do both and show the incongruity of the two – show a character's ideal version of a situation and then what's *actually* happening."

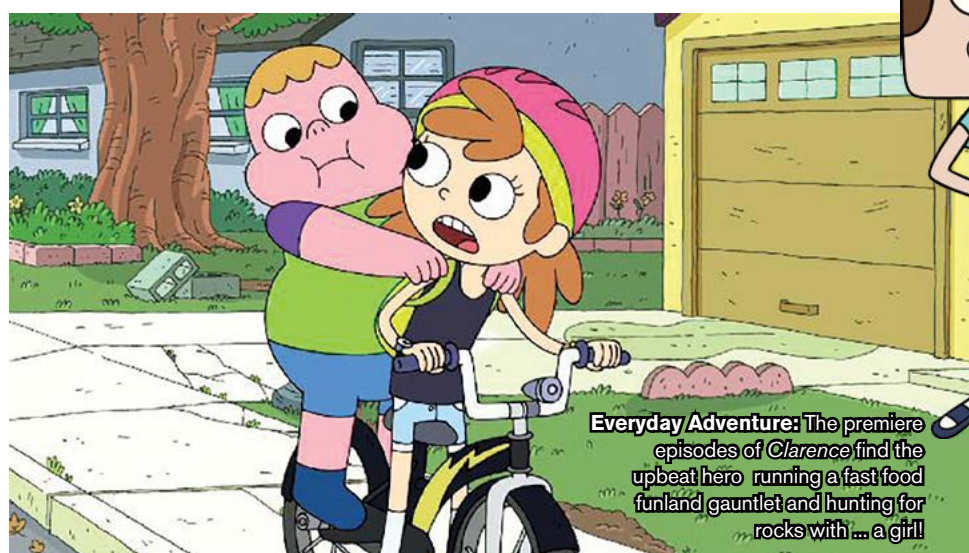
This blending of the realistic and the fantastical is reflected in the show's design, which favors ordinary (or even downright unappealing) locations made inviting with cartoony flair. And the character designs also teeter back and forth between the scales of probability.

"With all the characters, it's almost like the inconsistency *is* the consistency," says Boles. "Some look like Muppets, some look like they're from *Steven Universe*, but the art direction ties it all together. The way we justify it to ourselves is, the world is full of different-looking people." Boles adds that the showrunners wanted to avoid the *Simpsons* effect, where every character has to look just right to fit in to the existing animated world.

Page adds that another show philosophy is to treat background characters with care, making sure whatever they are doing on-screen is memorable. The old schoolmates add that they are always looking for ways to take these







**Everyday Adventure:** The premiere episodes of *Clarence* find the upbeat hero running a fast food funland gauntlet and hunting for rocks with ... a girl!



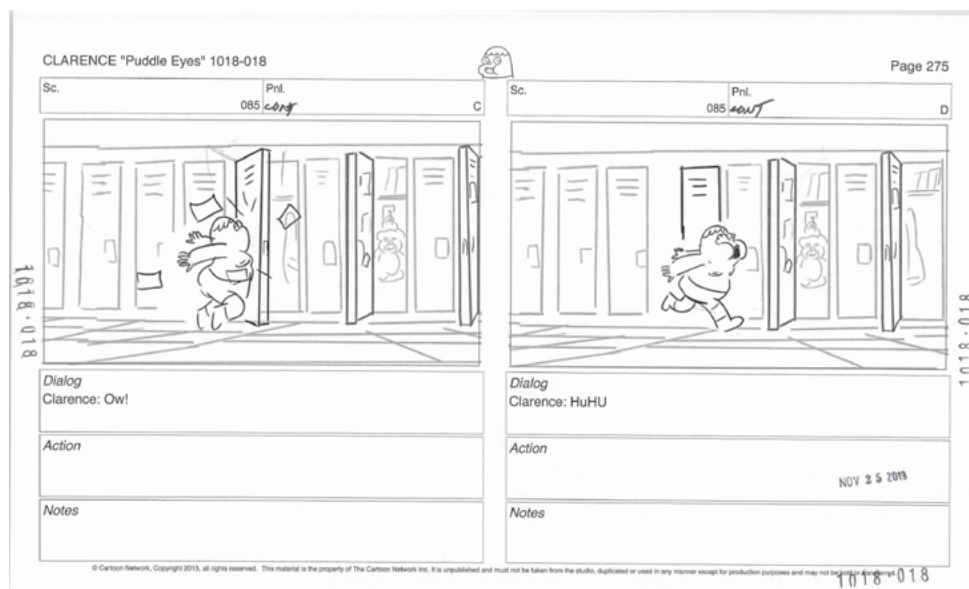
we should all be jealous of). Whether he's sneakily tiptoeing about while managing to knock over everything around him or flagrantly violating Jeff's personal space, it's all part of the plan as far as Clarence is concerned.

When asked about the toughest part of producing his first show, Page says while he loves every minute, the pace is hard to get used to: "Once you do an episode, and it's really good and you're proud of it, you have to start over. Every time. It's exciting, but it's very challenging."

Page and Boles list John Kricfalusi's *Ren & Stimpy* as well as *King of the Hill* and *SpongeBob SquarePants* (a few veterans of which are on the *Clarence* staff) and the feature work of Phil Lord and Chris Miller as their top animation inspirations. But when asked for advice for other upstart cartoonists, they say being true to yourself is the key.

"Don't do what you think other people are looking for, just do what you think is funny and cool," Page says. "And don't edit yourself, because if you ever do get a show, they will edit you."

**Clarence premieres Monday, April 14, at 7 p.m. on Cartoon Network. Visit our website for an extended interview.**



smaller roles and use them to expand *Clarence*'s story possibilities. "Another thing we're trying to push with the show is there's not just three main characters and everyone else is just there for a joke," says Boles. "Everyone has a chance to hang out with everyone ... the world

gets bigger and bigger."

Fans of old-school cartoons will appreciate *Clarence*'s emphasis on character-based and physical humor. Clarence, after all, is not all that aware of how clumsy he is and, frankly, doesn't care how ridiculous he looks (a trait



# A Comic Approach

The creators of Comedy Central's *TripTank* pull together a diverse slate of shorts that pairs up top comedy acts with animators. By Thomas J. McLean

**W**hat do you do when you run an animation studio and constantly run across some of comedy's funniest folks with ideas for shorts?

If you're Alex Bulkley and Corey Campodonico of Shadowmachine, you turn them into *TripTank*, a new eight-episode half-hour anthology series premiering April 2 on Comedy Central.

"This is really comedy based," says Bulkley. "What we've done is really aggregate a lot of talented comedy writers and put them together with an animation format, and that's any format of animation you can imagine."

Bulkley and Campodonico took inspiration for *TripTank* from their own experiences, preferences and even a little bit of history. Having been the original production house for *Robot Chicken*, they had experience in assembling a show of short sketches.

They also are fans of shows like *Liquid Television*, MTV's 1990s anthology show that brought experimental animation to an entire flannel-clad generation, as well as shorts festivals and events like Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation.

They also note that some of animation's most enduring hits, including *South Park*, *Beavis and Butt-head* and even *The Simpsons*, sprang out of short sketches or interstitials on anthology shows.

Sharp-eyed viewers caught a preview in December when the network aired the pilot, which features such creative comedy talent as Bob Odenkirk, Zach Galafianakis, Kumail Nanjiani, Brett Gelman and Kyle Kinane.

"We have a longstanding relationship with a lot of different people across the comedy spectrum, and we really believe in this kind of short format," says Campodonico.

Some of the biggest comedy names came in via an association with someone who had already worked with Bulkley and Campodonico. But the majority of sketches came in from just about everywhere.

"We fielded thousands and thousands of these pitches," says Bulkley. "Sometimes it was someone who had a fully developed concept with a bible, every character designed and episodes written and everything else, and that turned into a short. Other people came in with a paragraph idea and we would pair them

Jesus shows off his talent for turning water into wine in a sketch from *TripTank*, an anthology comedy series that premieres April 2 on Comedy Central.



with a creative team whether it was in house or out of house."

"This isn't a show that spends months in development. It's stuff that comes in right away and it either makes it or not," says Campodonico.

"We were fairly agnostic to what was coming in the door as long as it was funny," says Bulkley.

As executive producers, choosing the best content to fill eight episodes and deciding what airs with what was a major challenge. A huge board was worked endlessly to find the right mix for maximizing the impact of each short and each episode.

"It's a tricky matrix and sometimes what appears to work next to each other really doesn't," says Campodonico.

Making it even more difficult was the free-form nature of the shorts. "We're not going in with the writers or creators and saying this has to be exactly 60 seconds or 180 seconds; they all would come in at different times," says Bulkley. "So as you look at a full series, how best to program was by far and away the biggest challenge."

Shadowmachine's long relationship with Comedy Central fostered trust on the project, with Bulkley and Campodonico using their experience to focus on content that fit the network's needs and the network tapping its talent pool to bring in creators new to the ex-

ecutive producers.

Along with a diverse set of one-off shorts are some recurring sketches, such as the *TripTank* phone receptionist fielding insane calls of adoration or condemnation from the public, and a series called *Jeff and Some Aliens*.

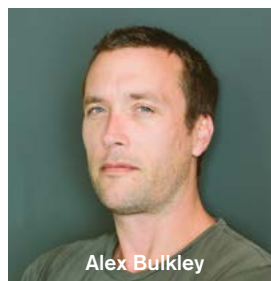
Bulkley says the recurring sketches give some balance to the idea of an anthology. "The weight isn't all on one sketch or one show the way it is with normal shows. There's something in it for everybody," he says. "But at the same time, it's fun to like some sketches more than others, which I think is what

makes it a fun show. It's unpredictable."

"It's important to create a spine that everyone can come back to week in and week out and have that spine be as funny as any of the sketches in the show," says Campodonico.

Whether anything that made the eight-episode first season of the show will break out into something big is unknown, but Bulkley and Campodonico would be neither surprised nor unhappy if that did indeed happen.

"We ended up with just about 100 individual properties, so you can imagine the potential spin outs or derivatives from the thing is big, but you never know where that needle in the hay is going to come from," says Bulkley. ♦



Alex Bulkley



Corey Campodonico



# A Universe of Evil Parody

**Robot Chicken** returns to the world of DC Comics for a new special, followed by the lucky seventh season of the Adult Swim hit. By Thomas J. McLean

**A**dult Swim's long-running stop-motion parody series *Robot Chicken* is on its way back to the air, with *Robot Chicken DC Comics Special II: Villains in Paradise* set to air April 6, and featuring everything from villain office politics, Lex Luthor's daughter coming to work with dad and a big villain vacation to the beach.

It's followed one week later by the premiere of the show's seventh season. Still running the show are co-creators and executive producers Seth Green and Matthew Senreich, who gave us the lowdown on all things *Robot Chicken*.

**Animation Magazine: Even villains have origins. What are the origins of this special?**

**Matthew Senreich:** In our first special, we focused on the heroes and really focused in on Aquaman, and from doing that we realized the villain characters from the DC special were popping a lot more than we thought. Alfred Molina brought so much to Lex Luthor that we went diving into the second special wanting to do something that was villain-centric. So we brought them to the forefront and wanted to follow their path from working at the Legion of Doom to going on vacation in some capacity.

**Do you find you can do more things in a special with these characters than in a regular episode?**

**Senreich:** When we have more time to find character arcs and get into their personality a little bit, it allows us to explore who they are and how they interact with every other character out there. If you're just doing a sketch on our regular show you're in and out and done in probably less than two minutes.

**Seth Green:** And you can focus on jokes.

**What were the animation challenges on this show?**

**Green:** There were a lot of characters on the screen at the same time. We wanted some very complicated things. We have a couple of elaborate dancing sequences where several characters

are dancing and singing at the same time. But the biggest challenge is that the third act of the episode takes place all at a beach environment that there were a lot of sketch requirements for but we had to be able to shoot it. We had to shoot it on multiple stages, we had to shoot it without exposing the limits of our sets – make it look like there was a convincing horizon line. So we did a lot of things in forced perspective, we did a lot of fore-

end of the season, we evolve the chicken mythology a little further.

**What are you excited about in this season's batch of shows?**

**Senreich:** We have a George R.R. Martin sketch, kind of a Hitchcockian thing with him.

**Green:** We have a good *Game of Thrones* thing.

**Senreich:** Chris Pine and Patrick Stewart are in a *Star Trek* sketch together.

**Green:** Oh, yeah. "The *Star Trek* Night Crew." That's the question: The crew can't be a 24-hour crew, so at some point there's got to be a night crew in there.

**Has your process for creating the show changed much now that you're on season seven?**

**Senreich:** I think, if anything, it's just gotten more efficient. We've known this process for so long it's just streamlining it and making it get easier each season.

**Green:** And we continue to hire people that are exciting to us, that are new that are still sort of discovering their talents and we work with them and give them a

safe place to find themselves and do their best work.

**Do you expect to do season eight? Do you foresee the show ever ending?**

**Green:** We'll definitely take a break before we start writing again, but I think we're still really having fun doing this. Matt at one point hypothesized *Robot Chicken* as a *Saturday Night Live*, something that could just keep going that uses a specific format and if we continue to bring in new writers and old experts and all continue to work together ... I don't know! As long as it's fun to make, I think we would.

**Senreich:** It's always got to feel like playing with friends. ♦



ground elements, we did a lot of tight composition to make them look and feel bigger than they actually are. Hopefully, no one will notice that our largest set is 10 by 10.

**Any DC characters you wanted to get in the show that didn't make it?**

**Green:** I always like to see Apache Chief on camera, but we just didn't have a place for him. We could have stuck him in the end battle, but we were focused on other things.

**What's going on in season seven?**

**Green:** We don't have a new opening sequence, but the opening sketch is an *Eyes Wide Shut* parody. And then, just to tease the





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Thanks again for everything!  
All the best,  
Lori Gloede  
Director of Development, Brain Zoo Studios

“ Thanks so much,... I had a great time. So many talented and experienced people there! Congratulations and thank you on running such an amazing event - looking forward to next year!

Peter McHugh  
Agent, The Gotham Group

“ The World Animation and VFX Summit will build the future of animation, it is a “must go to” event. ”

Raul Garcia







# Turn It Up to Eleven

A list of 10 plus 1 shows to watch for on the floor at MIP during the annual market, set for April 7-10

## Angel's Friends

**Produced by:** Play Entertainment, RTI Mediaset, Mondo TV

**Created by:** Simona Ferri (original comic books)

**Format:** 104 x 11 (two seasons), 80-minute TV movie

**Target audience:** Kids 6-12

**Type of animation:** HD 2D

**Synopsis:** Five young angels live in the crowded metropolis of Angie Town, where they study hard at school to become 100 percent angels. To do this, they must spend time on Earth following five lively humans while resisting the lures of the five devils-in-training who have arrived with a similar goal in mind.



**Selling Points:** With two seasons complete, Mondo's international sales department coordinator Micheline Azoury says the show's growing broadcast success is due to its high production quality, storytelling and relatable characters. "These days the girls' property market is really lacking, and here we are bringing broadcasters *Angel's Friends*, where each of the girl characters look like any of today's fashionable, adventurous teens. This is what a great girls' show can offer."

**Status:** Complete

**Broadcasters:** Acquired by Canale 1 Mediasat Italy, SIC Portugal, RTL Belgium, TVN Style Poland, Teletoon France, RTM Malaysia, Star TV Greece, GMA Philippines, DigiTurk Turkey, TV3 Russia, Aniplus Korea.

## Billy Green Builds!

**Produced by:** Little Airplane Productions and SeaWorld Kids

**Created by:** Josh Selig

**Format:** 52 x 11

**Target audience:** Preschool

**Type of animation:** 2D

**Synopsis:** *Billy Green Builds!* follows the adventures of 7-year-old Billy Green, who, along with his animal sidekick Moxy and transforming, solar-paneled vehicle Chuggy Buggy, travels the globe to build environmentally friendly, imaginative solutions that help animals in trouble.



**Selling points:** "SeaWorld Kids is doing wonderful work in the area of educating and entertaining young kids about the natural world. We're thrilled to be collaborating with them on this bold new animated preschool series," says Little Airplane founder Josh Selig.

**Status:** In development

## Bing

**Produced by:** Acamar Films, Brown Bag Films, Tandem Films

**Created by:** Ted Dewan

**Format:** 78 x 7

**Target audience:** Preschool

**Type of animation:** 3D CGI

**Synopsis:** Adapted from the books by award-winning author and illustrator Ted Dewan, *Bing* celebrates the real-life experiences of young children and the grown-ups in their lives in an authentic and highly relatable way. Each epi-

sode explores what real-life situations feel like for a preschool child, told from Bing Bunny's point of view — everything from getting dressed, to taking a bath or making a smoothie.

**Selling points:** Mikael Shields, CEO of Acamar Films says: "We've meticulously developed *Bing* with our partners at Brown Bag Films, to produce a unique high-budget television series which bravely takes on the genuine emotions of being a very young child and then dramatizes them in a joyful, moving and, most of all, authentic way. We've adopted a team-writing approach, recruiting talent from mainstream live-action drama. We've assembled an extraordinary hand-picked production team and cast to bring *Bing* to life, and we're all collectively as excited as a real 3-year old to begin to show the world the work we've all been doing these past few years."

**Status:** In production, UK TX slated for summer 2014

**Broadcasters:** CBeebies

## Chamelia

**Produced by:** Technicolor, Mercury Filmworks

**Created by:** Based on the book series by Ethan Long

**Format:** 52 x 11

**Target audience:** Preschool

**Type of animation:** 2D

**Synopsis:** *Chamelia* stars 6-year-old chameleon Chamelia who, contrary to the nature of chameleons, would rather stand out than blend in. Set in the town of Camouflage, the show celebrates the joys of being unique as the central character experiences familiar childhood situations at school, in the playground, at





**Chamelia**

the park and at home. Like most 6-year-olds, Chamelia embraces life with a flare and style all her own.

**Selling points:** Steven Wendland, head of creative & VP animation for Technicolor says: "Chamelia is a show we often use as a benchmark for the kinds of properties we're looking for. It is deceptively simple — Chamelia is the little chameleon who just stands out. We've had a tremendous response everywhere we've pitched at the markets because it's such a perfect blend of concept, design, and theme."

**Status:** In development

**Cleo**

**Produced by:** La Casa de Animada, La Mirada

**Created by:** Ana Sánchez-Gijón

**Format:** 39 x 5

**Target audience:** Kids 4-7, Preschool

**Type of animation:** Cut-Out / Multimedia 2D

**Synopsis:** Cleo is an excitable puppy enchanted by his young owner Irma's multicolored braces, which give her a rainbow smile. In a world of paper and crayon landscapes, the instant best friends navigate the daily life of a preschooler, brightening the day with their enthusiasm.



**Selling Points:** With an adorable lead duo and enchanting visuals, the show is sure to enchant young viewers. "Cleo is a fresh property with a quirky, hand-drawn style of animation and bubbly characters, guaranteed to engage young children across the globe with playful storylines and universal themes," says Sergi Reigt, CEO of distributor Imira Entertainment.

ment.

**Status:** In production, 13 episodes available with further delivery through 2014.

**Broadcasters:** None attached; debuting at MIPTV

**Copy Cut**

**Produced by:** Normaal Animation, Canal+

**Created by:** Alexis Lavillat, Dao Nguyen & Ludivine Marques-Verissimo

**Format:** 52 x 13

**Target audience:** Kids 6-12

**Type of animation:** 2D



**Synopsis:** Ari, Mac, Yuyu and Puk are the Copy Cut: a group of teenagers fond of cosplay. Selected for the great contest in Tokyo, the four friends set out in Mac's hippy grandma's vintage van on a crazy, costumed road trip. When unexpected obstacles pop up, the Copy Cut use their ingenuity and talent for portraying their favorite characters to solve problems — or make them worse.

**Selling Points:** The fast-paced road trip comedy offers a fresh spin on the genre, says AB International general director Valerie Vleeschhouwer: "Thanks to cosplay, it revisits pop-culture universes (videogames, comic books, TV series, movies, etc.) and bring the audience into a crazy and colorful world trip."

**Status:** Completed

**Broadcasters:** Canal+ Family

**K3**

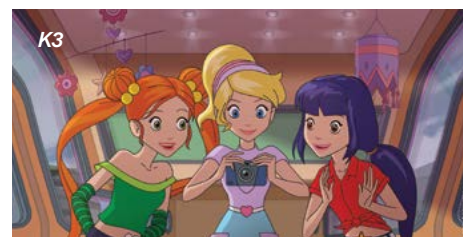
**Produced by:** Studio 100 Animation

**Created by:** Alan Gilbey & Jan Van Rijsselberge

**Format:** 52 x 13

**Target audience:** Kids 6-8

**Type of animation:** 2D



**Synopsis:** Based on the hugely popular girl band K3 (which has spawned the live-action series *The World of K3* and *Hello K3*), the animated alter egos of pop stars Kim, Kylie and Kate take viewers along on their global tour full of fun-packed diversions, mystery and excitement. The bubbly, breezy best friends never say no to an adventure.

**Selling points:** Studio 100 believes the new animated series will hit the mark with pop enthusiasts and young viewers keen on fashionable teen girls' exploits. "The K3 brand is already a licensing and merchandising success in Benelux, and we strongly believe in its high potential on the international scale with the arrival of the new animation series," says managing director Katell France.

**Status:** In production, delivery set for 2015

**Broadcasters:** M6 France is the commissioning free TV broadcaster; along with Teletoon+ for cable/satellite rights and in Flemish Belgium. K3 will be broadcast by Studio100 TV.

**Looped**

**Produced by:** DHX Media

**Created by:** Todd Kauffman & Mark Thornton

**Format:** 26 x 30

**Target audience:** 6-12

**Type of animation:** 2D

**Synopsis:** Ever wish your life had a reset button, or knew you were having a pop-quiz before it was popped? Wish you looked like a hero in front of that super cute girl, or knew the star quarterback's moves before he did? Spoiler alert! Luc and Theo can do all those things. That's because Luc and Theo are stuck in a time-loop where every day is the same Monday — and knowing the day inside out, they can rock it like it's Saturday. But it's



not all fun and games. Creating the Loop really glitched up the universal time stream and now Luc and Theo are finding things aren't as predictable as they try to make each Monday the best Monday ever.

**Selling points:** Josh Scherba, SVP distribution at DHX Media, says: "We believe *Looped* will appeal to every kid who wishes they could predict the future so they could use it to look really cool! There is wide demand for animated comedies for this demographic and the show continues our track record in this arena following hits such as *Johnny Test* and *Kid vs. Kat*."

**Status:** In production

**Broadcasters:** YTV Canada, Super RTL Germany

## Nutri Ventures — The Quest of the 7 Kingdoms

**Produced by:** Nutri Ventures Corp.

**Created by:** Rodrigo Carvalho & Rui Miranda

**Format:** 52 x 22

**Target audience:** Kids 4-10

**Type of animation:** 2D HD

**Synopsis:** Theo, Lena, Ben and Little Nina have never known real food, only the synthetic Genex 100 created by the nefarious, ultra-rich Alex Grand. When Theo learns the truth about real food and its importance, he and his friends set out to discover the Seven Kingdoms, gaining food-aided Nutri-Powers as they go, to bring nutrition back to their world.

**Selling points:** Nutri Ventures Corp. co-founder and managing partner Rui Lima Miranda says the action-adventure series entertains while creating an opportunity for education, not the other way around. "It is not edutainment, nor educational content — and because it is *pure entertainment*, *Nutri Ventures* has already sold to more than 25 territories and its ratings have great success." The

show is bolstered by its virtual world nutriventures.com.

**Status:** Complete; 40 additional episodes in pre-production

**Broadcasters:** RTP2 and Panda (Portugal), Disney Channel (Spain), MTV2 (Hungary), Pixel TV (Ukraine), Megamax (CEE, Hungary), Pop TV OTO (Slovenia), Super7 (Bulgaria), Logi Channel (Israel), Okto (Singapore), True (Thailand), RTM (Malaysia), SBT (Brazil), Incomsa (Colombia), DSmart TV (Turkey), Sun TV (India), Pt. Unggul Cipta (Indonesia). Available in the U.S. through YouTube, Kabillion and Hulu.

## Q Pootle 5

**Produced by:** Snapper Productions, BBC, ZDF Enterprises (distributor)

**Created by:** Nick Butterworth

**Format:** 52 x 11

**Target audience:** Preschool



**Type of animation:** CG

**Synopsis:** Based on the best-selling books by author and illustrator Nick Butterworth, the series follows the adventures of a friendly little alien and his friends — Oopsy, Eddi, Stella, Ray, Groobie, Bud-D and Planet Dave — as they tackle everyday problems on the final frontier.

**Selling Points:** "Q Pootle 5 is a fun and exciting show with friendship at its heart," says producer Ben Butterworth. "The mix of diverse and creative storylines, rich characters and

fantastic visuals has captured the imaginations of children and parents and helped us secure exceptionally strong viewing figures, with around 5.5 million people watching the show to date in the U.K."

**Status:** Complete

**Broadcasters:** CBeebies (U.K.), ABC (Australia), KiKA (Germany).

## Talking Tom and Friends

**Produced by:** Screen 21, Outfit7

**Created by:** Outfit7

**Format:** 52 x 11, plus 26 webisodes

**Target audience:** 6-12

**Type of animation:** HD CG

Talking Tom and Friends



**Synopsis:** Millions of users have seen Tom the cat stroked, poked or tapped inside the super popular apps. Now the globally admired character and his feline pals make the leap from the tiny screen to the small screen, sharing their "real life" adventures with young viewers.

**Selling points:** "There are more than 2.3 million fans who love the characters of Talking Tom on digital worldwide (apps, YouTube and social media) who are actively asking for a TV show. The development of a family comedy brand on licensing with integration of second screen into the show and the product will deliver a unique TV show," says Carlos Biern, CEO of BRB Internacional.

**Status:** In production for release fall 2015

**Broadcasters:** Under negotiation ♦







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# Going Deeper with the *Pet Pals*

The Italian property celebrates 10 years with a stereoscopic 3-D feature. By Thomas J. McLean.

**A**fter 10 years, the *Pet Pals* are going stronger than ever.

The children's animated series, created by Sergio Manfio, is back for its second big-screen adventure: *Pet Pals in Windland*. Manfio wrote and directed the feature, which is due for release March 27 in Italy. Produced by Gruppo Alconi and distributed by RAI Cinema Distribution, the film will be shown in both stereoscopic 3-D and 2D versions.

We caught up with Manfio in advance of the film's release to discuss the evolution of the franchise, the challenges of making the sequel and the future of *Pet Pals*.

**Animation Magazine: What did you set out to accomplish that is new and different with *Pet Pals in Windland*?**

**Sergio Manfio:** The first new aspect is related to content: we wanted to create an "eco fairy tale" which offers children the elements they need to reflect upon alternative and renewable energy sources. The second novelty is to do with form and is the most original element of the film: the audience is continuously called upon to take part in the action on screen

by singing, dancing, clapping their hands and helping their favorite characters so that the story develops in the best way possible. First reactions to screenings have been very positive.

**Has your understanding of the *Pet Pals* changed after having done all the television series and now two movies?**

**Manfio:** No, it hasn't changed, it has just been perfected. The six *Pet Pals* have acquired more specific personalities, we were able to better define the different aspects which characterize their personalities and which aim to represent the characters of children today. This means that every boy and girl can identify with one or more of the *Pet Pals*, sharing positive traits with their heroes and, why not, identifying their faults.

**What was the biggest challenge in making the new film?**

**Manfio:** Obviously, we wanted to resolve the different issues which came up in our analysis of the previous film. We are convinced that we have taken an important step forward and the whole team has noted a clear increase in the creative, structural and productive quality. There has also been considerable interest in the film from the international market and this makes us very hopeful indeed.

**Was there any new animation technology used to make the movie?**

**Manfio:** We used stereoscopic technology for

ferent and are probably best used to deal with different themes. The future of 2D can be developed through graphic research and experimentation, which can be very stimulating and creative, while 3D and 3DS, based on the signals coming from various different directions, will move better in the domain of the traditional or not so traditional story.

**Why do you think the *Pet Pals* remain popular with audiences?**

**Manfio:** Because, as I mentioned before, it is a miscellaneous group of protagonists in which different aspects of a child's personality coexist. Although the group is diverse, there is a strong bond between them and this is an important element

which is continuously present. Instead of violence, the *Pet Pals* use creativity and astuteness as weapons to get the better of their nemesis: the evil Crow Witch. All of this is developed and reinforced by the interactive aspects which are offered to the audience.

**What did you learn about using stereoscopes for the first time to tell a cinematic story?**

**Manfio:** Personally, for my role as director of the movie, I found it interesting to work on the elements which this type of technique requires from the use of frames. This new opportunity enabled me, as I mentioned before, to take a further step forward and to be more decisive in asking for the direct participation of the audience.

**What's next for the *Pet Pals*? Will you do another movie?**

**Manfio:** At the moment, we are starting work on a new series of *Pet Pals* which develops our research in audience interaction. We are preparing a new film, but more of that next time. ♦



the first time. This created important new jobs and study opportunities within our company linked to the technical aspects, but more importantly changes to the forms of direction which this technique requires. We used stereoscopy to highlight the moments when the characters come out from the screen to talk to the audience. As this is a film geared towards children and young people, the use of the technology was carefully measured.

**What do you think are the strengths of CG animation versus 2D animation or stop-motion, both of which you have used in other projects?**

**Manfio:** I think that they are two worlds, which have little in common or much less than is generally believed. The techniques are radically dif-



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# A Big Relief

New tax credits are giving an immediate jolt to the U.K. animation industry. By Thomas J. McLean

It's only been less than a year since the United Kingdom enacted tax relief credits aimed at reviving its TV animation industry, and so far the results have exceeded expectations.

"We've gone from a situation where last year, 2012 to 2013, there were only two animated television dramas that were commissioned by British broadcasters to domestic animation companies," says Adrian Wootton, chief executive of Film London and the British Film Commission. "And already, in nine and a half months, we're now up to 25 new domestic television shows that have been commissioned and we have a bunch of co-productions going on that just frankly wouldn't have happened before."

The tax relief offers companies that spend at least 25 percent of a production's budget in the U.K. to get back in cash from the government 25 percent of what they spend. Unlike a similar tax relief plan for live-action television, there is no minimum budget, and neither credit has a sunset clause that would lead them to expire.

As a result, Wootton says: "They're predicting a 300 to 400 percent turnover in the increase on U.K. spend on animation compared to 2012. That's how significant a trigger the animation tax relief is because for the first time in a long time animation companies from all over the world are saying, 'Yes, we can place the work here.'"

For U.K.-based animation studios, large and small, the tax relief has made an immediate impact.

"The tax credit has allowed us to push what is achievable in animated series," says Oli Hyatt, creative director of London-based Blue Zoo Animation Studios. "For example, *Digby Dragon*, a new show we are just moving into production on, would simply not have been possible to achieve in the way we have envisioned without the 25 percent tax credit."

The credit also has brought in work for hire projects, Hyatt says. "Pre-tax-credit, this would have never happened," he says. "We hadn't had inward investment from overseas in to the production for the previous 14 years our company was running, so in those terms it really is a game changer."

Julie Stall, VP of production for Toronto-based Portfolio Entertainment, says the credit



*Digby Dragon*

is very attractive because of its broad definition of what spending qualifies a project.

"The definition of 'U.K. spend' is fairly broad in that the credit is based on goods or services 'used or consumed' in the U.K. and isn't restricted to U.K. labor," she says. "Although the rebate percentages in some countries may be higher than in the U.K., the definition of eligible expenditures may differ, so it's important to actually run the numbers in various scenarios before determining the actual value of the credits."

Portfolio has enjoyed a U.K. co-production arrangement on its series *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That*, and Stall says the credits are a good incentive to team up with more U.K. companies. "In the past, it has been a challenge financing co-productions with the U.K., partly because of competition for broadcast space and the high cost of production in the U.K.," she says. "But the tax credits really assist in closing the gap and providing some flexibility with financing options."

Hyatt says there has been a noticeable influx of business enquiries. "In terms of the type of interest from abroad, it has gone a bit crazy," he says. "Some big players are considering setting up studios, some are looking for co-pro's, some looking to simply farm entire projects out. We really have been put back on the map!"

Moses Nyachae, director of film and television at the London accounting firm of Saffery



Julie Stall



Adrian Wootton

Champness, says the tax credit is being supported with investments in infrastructure and education to ensure the U.K. can support the work it hopes to bring in. "The U.K. government is investing heavily in training and incentivizing R&D to ensure the U.K. has world-class talent and facilities."

Wootton's office has brought in animation execs from all over the world – including high-profile visits from American and Canadian delegations – to tour the U.K. and its facilities and sell them on the idea of bringing work there.

"U.K. producers are coming to the table with more money and this can only be good news to all parties looking to get their shows financed and produced," says Nyachae. "I would say it's a little too early to tell whether the incentive will result in a significant increase in co-production activity, but what we do know is that a lot more discussions are happening between U.K. producers and their overseas counterparts, so hopefully a good number of these conversations will translate in to actual co-productions. The next 12-18 months will be interesting in that respect." ♦





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# Turkey on the Rise

Animation in the nation is growing by leaps and bounds, with local and imported shows showing ratings and licensing strength. By Hamdullah Yalvak

The 2014 Discop market in Istanbul, held March 4-6, showed off Turkey's animation industry and its progressive growth over the past decade.

The local animation industry includes the following companies and programs: Samanyolu Broadcasting Group, makes of the hit animated series *Can*; Animax, makers of *Keloglan* and *Ankal*; Kaynak Licensing, with *Niloya*; Cordoba Animation, with *Nane ile Limon* and *Cille*; Dusyeri, with *Pepee*; Portakal Animasyon, with *Canim Kardesim*; and Mart Ajans, with *Catlak Yumurtalar/Sizinkiler*.

Those shows have done well on the top five children's channels, where they compete with imports such as *Caillou*, *Pocoyo*, *Ben 10* and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Local programs also have created successful licensing and merchandising activities in Turkey for the last few years.

Recent developments in the territory include: One of the world's best-known preschooler series, *Shaun the Sheep*, started to show on Minika Go kids channel. U.K.-based

Aardman's TV broadcast agreement with Minika Go, which is one of the channels of ATV - Turkuvaz Broadcasting Group, was complemented by a deal with Royal License company for representation of both merchandising and publishing rights for *Shaun The Sheep* in Turkey.

Samanyolu Broadcasting Group has completed the first season of its animated cartoon series *Can*, which it produces in-house using motion-capture techniques. *Can* is about a 5-year-old boy learns values and good manners from his family, repeating his lessons with a song he learns during each episode. *Can* has already started to air on Yumurcak TV, which is the kids channel of Samanyolu.

Kaynak Licensing, a subsidiary of Kaynak Holding, is about to complete the first season of its first animated series, *Niloya*. *Niloya* is about a 4-year-old girl who explores and learns new things everyday with the help of her family. She is very curious about nature, in particular. She has a very vivid imagination that she expresses through songs she performs in every

episode. *Niloya* will start to air on Yumurcak TV channel in early 2014.

Metropol Lisans A.S., the licensing and merchandising subsidiary of Dunya Group, accelerated its licensing programs and activities with new brands. Metropol signed agency deals with Famosa for *Pin y Pon* and with Mediatoon for *Marsupilami*.

Representing some licensed brands like *Caillou*, *Arthur*, *Pocoyo*, *Tarcin* and *Friends* and *Louie*, Metropol Lisans also owns the *Can* brand. Metropol Lisans has all merchandising and licensing rights for *Can* worldwide and will be ready to distribute license rights in early 2014. Yumurcak Dunyasi, which is the marketing and distribution company of Dunya Group, will be the master toy licensee and publisher for the *Can* brand in Turkey. ♦



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# Fear and Tooning in Venice

Cartoons on the Bay puts Russian animation at the top of its billet, which is well-rounded with celebrations of Italian and global animation hits. By Thomas J. McLean



After a year off, Cartoons on the Bay is back and ready for its 17th edition in Italy's famed Bride of the Sea: Venice.

With fear in cartoons as its theme for this year, Cartoons on the Bay offers a robust program with more than 600 submissions yielding 45 competition finalists representing more than 40 countries.

The three-day event, set for April 10-12, will be held this

year in the historic Palazzo Labia, which features frescoes painted by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.

The festival has chosen Russia as the guest country for this year's event, a pick artistic director Roberto Genovesi says was made long before current events landed the nation on front pages around the world, and is based solely on the quality of animation coming out of the country.

"We thought about Russia a long time ago," he says. "The Russian animation industry has seen great growth in the last 10 years. There is a lot of independent work, a lot of new series and movies and attention to new forms of writings. So it was normal to think about Russia for an intensive focus."

That focus includes honoring Russia with a Pulcinella Special Award, and attendance from top Russian animation directors such as Aleksandr Petrov, four-time Oscar nominee and jury member Konstantin Bronzit, Ivan Maximov, Igor Kovalyov and Vadim Sotkov.

Petrov, whose credits include winning an Oscar for best animated short for 1999's *The Old Man and the Sea*, will



receive the Pulcinella Award for Lifetime Achievement. A second lifetime achievement award will be given to the Argentinean animator Guillermo Mordillo, known mostly as Mordillo.

Petrov was born in Russia, where he graduated from the State Institute of Cinema and Television and began a career in animation. But it was in Canada that he reached success with the animated adap-



Aleksandr Petrov



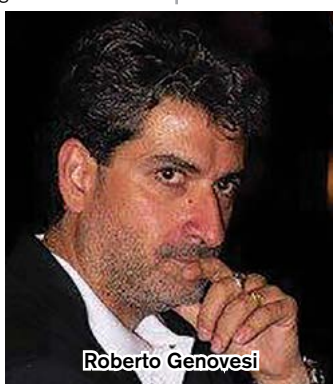
The Old Man and the Sea

tation of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. The 20-minute short was made from 29,000 frames, each hand painted in oils on glass and then photographed in IMAX. In addition to the Oscar, it won the Grand Prix at Annecy. His second film, *My Love*, was distributed by Studio Ghibli in 2006, and he is currently seeking funds for his third project from his home in Yaroslavl, northeast of Moscow.

Programming focusing on Russian animation includes a large panel on Friday morning featuring Maximov, Kovalyov and Sotkov. The festival also will screen retrospectives of films and shorts of some of the most important Russian studios, like Melnitsa Animation, Toonbox, Animation Studio Moskva, Pchela Studio and

Klasky-Csupo.

Heading up the jury for this year's competition is Italian film director Fausto Brizzi, director of *Night Before Exams*, *Ex* and *Crazy About Me*.



Roberto Genovesi

Also on the jury, alongside Brizzi and Bronzit, are Giorgio Cavazzano, James Capobianco and Richard Rouse.

"I chose figures with experience in the world of comics (like Cavazzano), in the world of video games (like Rouse) alongside directors and artists with proven experience in the field of cartoons (like Capobianco or Bronzit) but also a well known director of live-action films that knows very well the world of young people (like Fausto Brizzi)," says Genovesi. "It's a mix of viewpoints."

The festival competition offers a Pulcinella Award in nine categories: TV series for preschool, TV series for kids, TV series for teens, hybrid TV series, educational and social issues work, TV pilot, advertising and promotional work, interactive animation and short film. Additional screenings outside the competition are set in each category.

"We have not made any changes because the festival by its nature is a festival that studies the changes of languages and formats," says Genovesi. "Pulcinella Awards are our trademark from our origins. Everything else is always evolving."

Two special awards will be presented this year, with *Peppa Pig* honored as Phenomenon of the Year, while Iginio Straffi, creator of the popular TV series *Winx Club*, will receive the Pulcinella Special Award to celebrate its 10th anniversary.

Additionally, an Italian Studio of the Year award will go to Mad Entertainment, the creative studio that produced *The Art of Happiness* by Alessandro Rak.

International guests this year include Scott Ross, founder of Digital Domain and a pioneer of digital technologies in visual effects, and Alison Norrington, founder of Storytellers, a worldwide reference for the development of trans-media projects.

Special screenings include the anime feature

*The Garden of Words*, directed by Makoto Shinkai; a preview of Juan Campanella's animated feature *Underdogs*; a screening of *Pet Pals in Windland* from Gruppo Alconi; a preview of *The Nut Job*; and the Italian premiere of *Scooby Doo!: WrestleMania Mystery*.



Guillermo Mordillo

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# An All-New Noah

ILM pushes limits to fulfill director Darren Aronofsky's vision of the biblical classic. By Bill Desowitz

For all of the pre-release controversy surrounding Darren Aronofsky's ambitious *Noah*, starring Russell Crowe as a proto-environmentalist who suffers "survivor's guilt" after the deluge, let's not lose sight of Industrial Light & Magic's tremendous VFX accomplishments. Indeed, *Noah* turned out to be a daunting animation and rendering challenge, considering the fur and scope.

One shot, in particular, of the animals filing into the Ark and going to sleep, is the biggest rendering accomplishment in ILM history: 1,300 plus total render passes, which would've taken nearly 40 years to do on a single processor.

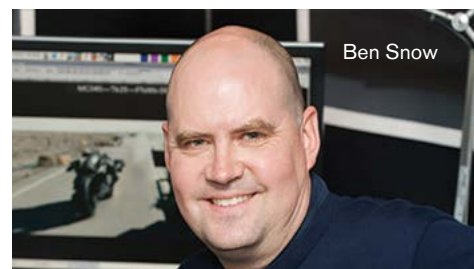
"Darren wanted to reinvent the biblical epic – he didn't want the typical animals associated with Noah's Ark," says ILM VFX supervisor Ben Snow. "And in trying to be original, that permeated everything. Darren sent us a book of reference imagery with essays by screenwriter Ari Handel and this was a thoughtful approach that tried to be relevant and different from the '50s biblical films."

"We initially talked about designing many different kinds of animals but it was most important to depict them in pairs. We looked at extinct animals, we looked at animals from people's imaginations and we looked at fantastical animals. And then we went through a whole lot of real animals and came up with binders of animals for Darren to select."



ILM couldn't use a kangaroo, for example, but they could use a less common marsupial. They could use a wildebeest but not a zebra. They had a great time with ancient horses and added some pachyderms so there was something that looked familiar to the audience. "But then we looked at a primitive form of the pachyderm that had the tusks coming out of the lower jaw," Snow says. "Essentially, we were trying to establish a world that existed before the Earth was flooded, so it's not going to be the same as the world we recognize today. This even impacted the landscapes and skies, which look like an older civilization."

Aronofsky's approach was founded on a



Ben Snow

realistic, gritty style yet there is still a sense of the fantastical as well. The animals are mostly featured in large crowd shots of thousands filing into the Ark, but trying to suggest a variety of mammals was tricky. At one point, Snow went to the Natural Museum of History to look



at the colors and discovered that there isn't much variation beyond basic browns, blacks and whites.

"How do we animate all of these animals and how do we distinguish them? We came up with the Zoo Project, which tries to break down groups of animals and figure out what they have in common," Snow says. "For example, heads, claws or hooves? Does the foot go down on the ground or does the animal have a tail? Our creature team sat down and came up with half a dozen base animals, which shared physiological characteristics. The idea was that they could share a rig and a topology so we could then transport materials and fur maps and textures between the animals and leverage animation across animals even though individual animals might look very different. This allowed them to rapidly build 100 different variations to suggest they had every animal in the world."

Interestingly, this was the first film on which ILM used the popular Massive crowd software and it worked well for crowd scenes but was trickier when dealing with hundreds of different types of animals, all different sizes, and situations where you've got pachyderms next to rodents, and the proximity rules get complicated so they don't run into one another. And Aronofsky wanted them in pairs, of course, so they had to make sure the animals didn't want them to wander off from one another.

"We built an underlying rig that allowed the skin to deform," Snow says. "It had muscles, we did simulations, and one of the advantages of our zoo technology was that the animator would animate a base type, and we then applied that to the other types; then the simulation team would run a simulation on that and bake that out and so the simulation was able to run along with the animation. Once we blocked out these giant shots with all the animals, we'd go back in and do hero animation to add eye blinks, ear flicks and head tossing. I think we had to create more animation variation than we anticipated and a lot on top to avoid repetition and robotic movement."

For the big rendering spectacle in the Ark, ILM made an interior Ark set covering the first third. The shot shows the arrival of the animals and going to sleep and the extent of the Ark. They did a cable cam shot on the set in Brooklyn. And in digi-matte, they made a big extension of that. They additionally shot a plate with Crowe and the family and combined that with exterior plate material shot on the exterior Ark set in Long Island.

"We started with a Massive sim and then built all the geometry of the Ark interior, tweaked that and then identified a group that



ILM used crowd simulations to ensure the hordes of animals were convincing in *Noah*.

would become hero animation and handed that off to the animation team. Then on top of that, because the animals sit down and go to sleep, they also animated them circling and looking for a space. Then the compositors laid in sleep-inducing smoke. It ended up being more than 2,000 renders with hair and we ran 250 Massive simulations for big animal shots."

Then there was the water – the biggest deluge in VFX history, according to Snow. ILM was able to combine the complexity of *Battleship* water (using the Physbam engine) with the speed of *Pacific Rim* water (using the more heavily GL-based engine).

"Waters from the earth erupt, and that was important to Darren," Snow says. "So you have large waves pushing debris ahead of them, smashing through the forest as they go, and then breaking out into this clearing and inter-

acting with geysers. And we cut to a shot of the scaffolding collapsing, which was a rigid sim, and eventually going under water. But we wouldn't have been able to iterate shot after shot and show it Darren for his comments and approval without some of the tools developed on *Pacific Rim*."

But it's fitting: irregular VFX for an irregular version of the iconic biblical tale.

**Visit the online Ark Experience to interactively explore the three decks of Noah's ark:** <http://www.noahmovie.com/theark/>  
Bill Desowitz is owner of Immersed in Movies ([www.billedesowitz.com](http://www.billedesowitz.com)), author of *James Bond Unmasked* ([www.jamesbond-unmasked.com](http://www.jamesbond-unmasked.com)) and a regular contributor to *Thompson on Hollywood and Animation Scoop* at *Indiewire*.



## Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry

### ToonBoom's Animate Pro 3.0

ToonBoom has definitely carved a niche for itself in the animation world, from the production-level Harmony products down to the tools for individual artists. They love to share technology across platforms and promote the artistry within each user. The latest iteration of its midtier product, Animate Pro 3.0, brings with it an advanced toolset with a balanced focus on drawing, look management and complex animation tools – and all in 64-bit.

A new pencil set adds to a strong brush system, with stroke controllability that allows lines to be laid down and manipulated later, including Bezier controls, thickness, color and texture. The pencil stroke works integrally with paint and fill functions so that fills will reach to the core stroke rather than pixel boundaries. This gives users the freedom to experiment with stroke styles, even after painting has been completed. Furthermore, these changes will propagate to all the frames in the animation. And the setting can be saved as presets to be applied across a whole project or sequence.

The color palettes can be manipulated after the fact, and have those changes be universal. But even more im-

pressive is that colors can be globally tinted and saved as a new palette. That palette can then be applied to other shots, or reverted. The color scheme for a character then holds continuity across sequences and looks – the difference between a day scene and a night scene, for example.

If these features sound mundane, then just try to get through even a short film trying to keep track of looks and keeping them on model.

On the shot-assembly side of the toolset, Animate Pro has implemented a node-based compositor, as in Nuke or Fusion. This offers amazing possibilities for complex layering of animation which, if setup correctly, just works. For example, having animation happening within other animation, masked out by foreground and background animation. All happening within the network of nodes.

Animate Pro has borrowed technology from the 3-D animation world by implementing a sophisticated deforming system driven by a hierarchical bone system. Along with normal shape deformation, textures and the vector-based lines from the pencil system are also affected. IK and FK systems can be easily swapped so that you can animate with free-flowing appendages, or you can lock the feet or hands into place.



And these are just the highlights. Definitely, for anyone wanting to do 2-D animation, you can feel confident that through the experience of ToonBoom, you'll have a rock-solid toolset powerful enough to get things done without getting bogged down in the tech.

### The Foundry's Nuke 8

The trouble with really productive software companies is that I don't have enough space to write about all the advances in each of their releases. The Foundry definitely falls into this category. So, here is the hit parade of features for the recently released Nuke 8 ... and really there is something for everyone!

For the motion designers, Nuke 8 implements text tools, allowing for text animation and editing directly in the interface. While in this first iteration it's not going to be as robust as After Effects or Cinema4D, this is a huge step from where it was, which was ... practically nonexistent. So keep an eye out – Nuke may be horning in on your turf.

Color-focused guys get a whole slew of both artistic and technical color specific tools. The color sliders, which in earlier versions were just that – sliders – are now accompanied by color wheels for more refined control between hue, value and saturation. Hue is an outside dial for control, separate from the saturation, isolating the two parameters and – for me – a much easier way



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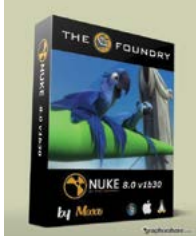
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to envision how I'm affecting the color. The pixel analyzer allows you to quickly select and store different pixel values or averages of values, which is great for complex color correction. And then the scopes – Waveform, Vector and Histograms – give those technical guys the feedback they need for not only aiding in match clips, but also in sticking within thresholds like for broadcast. (Tip: Learn how to read scopes, people).

And for the trackers, matte painters and 3-D savvy types, an Edit Geo node has been created. You no longer have to keep swapping back and forth to your favorite 3-D software to tweak the models receiving your projections. If a corner is off, just dig in there and adjust your verts. It even supports Alembic files. Not only that, but a wireframe display helps out with validating tracks.

There are even some gifts for the technical directors. For Pythoners, there is now an "include Nuke" option, which means that all scriptable Nuke functions are accessible from any interpreter. For the C++ guys, a new Planar Framework allows you to output planar data. And, The Foundry developed a thing they call Blink, which lets dev guys throw image processing operations to either the CPU or the GPU without having to write different sets of code.

Lots of really great advances that make upgrading to (or buying) Nuke 8 worth the expense (and yes, I know its expensive).

### Solid Angle's Arnold

I have been waiting years to write this review – literally years! – I only wish I had more space to cover it.

The first Arnold use blew us vfx folks away back in 1999 with a short by Daniel Martinez Lara called *Pepe*. Shortly after, it was used to great effect for the Oscar-nominated short, *Fifty Percent Grey* (no relation to *Fifty Shades of Grey*). In 2004, Sony Pictures Imageworks went into a deal with Arnold creator Marcus Fajardo to develop the product in-house and has been used to fabulous effect for nearly every SPI production since *Monster House*. For the next decade, Arnold has been licensed to a limited (albeit not insubstantial) number of companies, the reason being that the Solid Angle development team would be better able to maintain the demands of a few studios, rather than a gagillion users.

Now, with nearly all of the vfx nominated films using Arnold, including the winner, *Gravity*, Solid Angle is taking that step into a brand new world.

Arnold is a brute force, physically-based, Monte Carlo ray trace renderer, which is a lot of fancy words which say that it renders physically accurate imagery using a big hammer to calculate rather than sacrificing the fidelity of the imagery with short cuts. And frankly, with the computing power at our dis-

posal, the short cuts of the past don't 'really' need to be used anymore. Arnold chews up tens, in not hundreds, of millions of polys and spits out amazing imagery – just ask WhiskyTree about their Elysium model, or Industrial Light and Magic for the robots in *Pacific Rim*.

Arnold is a stand-alone renderer, but plugins for Maya, Houdini, and Softimage (well, not for much longer) get the 3D data over to Arnold for rendering. It's easy to set up, and easy to use. Most of the tweaking comes in the form of a couple sliders to determine sampling as you work to get noise out of the image. And really, that's the big tussle – the noise.

The price for a seat is comparable to, say, Vray, but without the benefit of extra render nodes. However, you have the option of renting seats at \$8.50/day if you need to boost your rendering capacity for short bursts. You can start with a free trial download and get yourself rendering.

**Todd Sheridan Perry is a vfx supervisor and digital artist who has worked on numerous features, including *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *Speed Racer*, 2012 and *Final Destination 5*. You can reach him at [todd@teaspoonvfx.com](mailto:todd@teaspoonvfx.com).**

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# Pushing the Animation Envelope

The ever-changing demands of creating customized content for live experiences keep life interesting for Mousetrappe. By Thomas J. McLean

If animation and visual effects weren't difficult enough to create for the relatively predictable demands of a movie or TV show, imagine if every project had to be built from the ground up to a completely different set of circumstances.

That's the norm for companies like Burbank-based Mousetrappe, founded in 2005 by Disney veterans Daren Ulmer and Ken Murphy, who were looking to focus on creating digital media for installations ranging from theme parks to museums.

"I think there's a little bit of self-torture in my DNA, because I don't like to do the same thing twice," says Ulmer, an Imagineering alumnus and CEO of Mousetrappe. (And, yes, the name is at least in part a play on Ulmer's

former employer. "It kind of started as a Disney joke, but we really liked the concept of building a better mouse trap," he says.)

This area spans everything from creating animations to be projected onto 3-D objects such as Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty Castle to producing the Kennedy Space Center's Space Shuttle Atlantis exhibition, for which Mousetrappe won the VES Award last month for Outstanding Visual Effects in a Special Venue Project.

The Atlantis exhibit exemplifies the unusual nature of each project Mousetrappe takes on. Mousetrappe's tasks included producing for the preshow reenactments of the initial design meetings for the shuttle, including a sequence in which original shuttle program



Daren Ulmer

director Maxime Faget assembled NASA employees at a warehouse in Houston and demonstrated his idea by throwing a glider



Mousetrappe created custom animations to emulate the environment Atlantis operated in.





down from the rafters.

"Once we found that story, we brought that scene to life through animation of this glider, set into this historical environment," says Ulmer. "That sets the tone for this whole experience and allows us to present the space shuttle not as an artifact of the past but as something that people are still dreaming of."

The main show is presented in a theater large enough for 250 people standing and is projected on a 30-foot by 30-foot screen as well as four arches that reach over the audience to create a kind of dome experience. The show itself features a mix of archival footage and visual effects extensions along with new animated scenes of the shuttle itself in situations like atmospheric re-entry that couldn't be filmed.

The preshow leads to the Atlantis itself, which is suspended at an angle in a two-level gallery with its cargo doors open to emulate how it looked in orbit. Behind the shuttle is

a 120-foot LED screen featuring a Mouse-trappe-produced seven-minute background loop simulating the environment Atlantis experienced as it orbited the planet.

"A big point of this was not to make it feel like it was some relic sent off to a warehouse somewhere, but to make it feel alive and see it the way it was used, not mothballed," says Ulmer.

The company also recently worked on a historical exhibit executive produced by Tom Hanks called "Beyond All Boundaries" for the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

Ulmer says the company keeps a core staff of production designers and visual effects supervisors, and hires freelance artists to work on specific projects. "The biggest job that Mousetrappe has is to really understand how both creatively and technically the media serves the overall show and the overall physical space," says Ulmer. "And it's our job to translate that to our artists and animators so they don't get caught up in the technical

aspects and they can do their job."

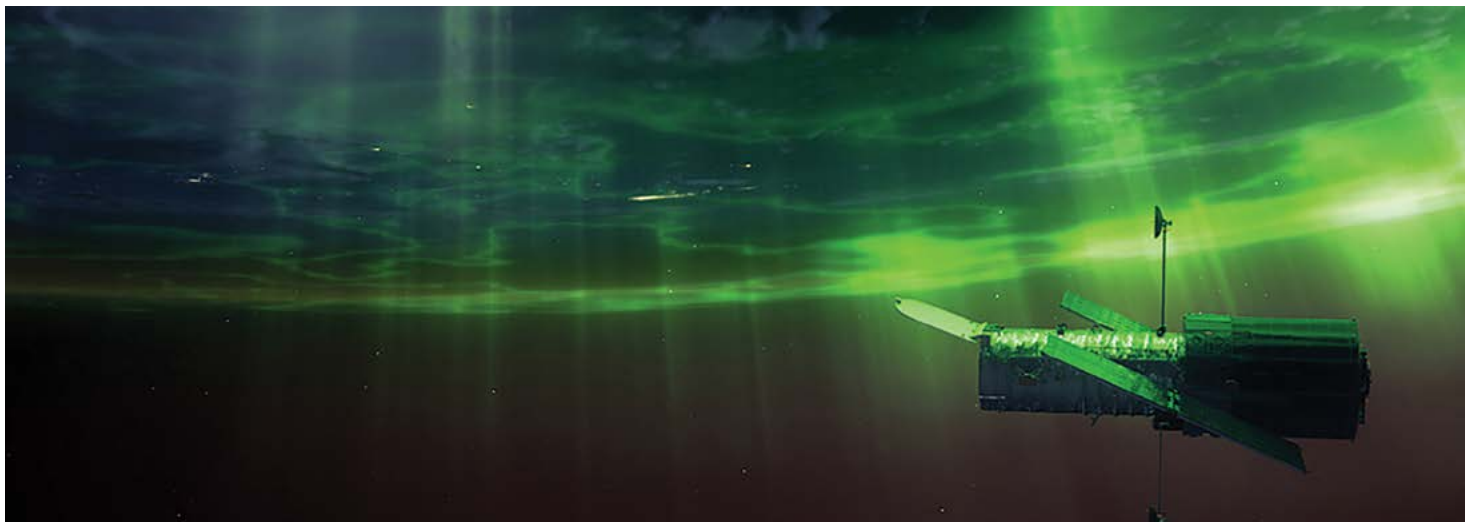
The ever-changing canvas of these projects means traditional working methods are tweaked, too.

For example, storyboarding will often be done from different points of view: the action and animation of the creative work itself, and how that work fits into the context of the larger exhibit.

Shots also are in development longer and often run significantly longer than a shot in a feature or TV show. "Our shots tend to be hundreds of frames, not dozens of frames," Ulmer says.

With international projects – the Middle East and Asia are hot right now, Ulmer says – and competition from vendors such as Los Angeles-based Super 78 Studios and Blur Studio, the field is one that keeps Ulmer interested.

"I would love to do some great feature films, but for me I like the challenge of a new format each time," he says. ♦





# All for One and One for All

The Republic Collective's model for assembling creative advertising talent is designed to create opportunities for companies like Denver animation house SPILLT. By Thomas J. McLean

Finding work for yourself or seeking out just the right person for a particular job in the modern creative economy is not always easy — and that's something advertising veterans Erika Levy and Danielle Bryan are hoping to change.

The duo have founded The Republic Collective, a company using a collaborative production model designed to open up opportunities in the advertising world for companies like SPILLT, a Denver-based animation company that created a launch spot for The Republic.

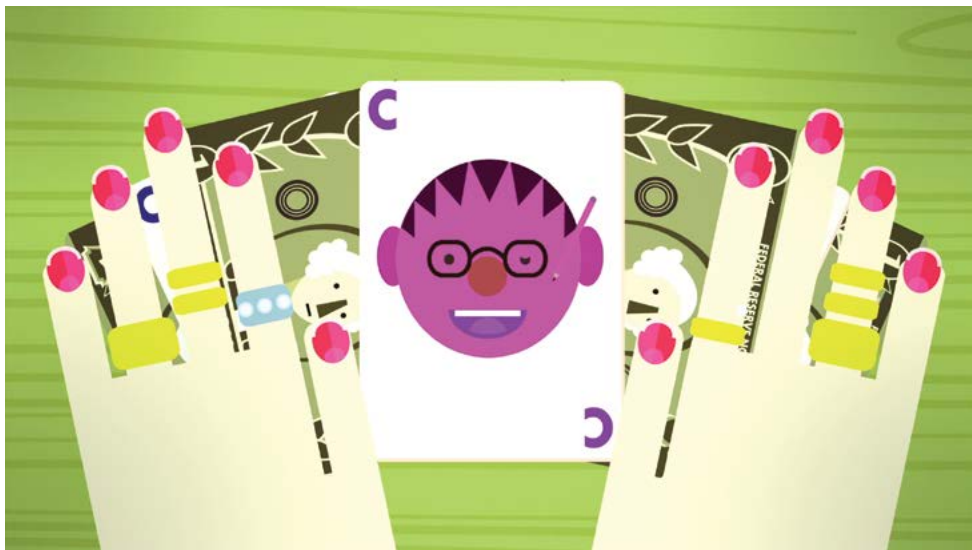
Bryan says The Republic sprang from a need she and Levy saw in the advertising landscape for flexibility in matching up creative clients from anywhere with the right job, big or small. The idea is to assemble a national stable of vetted creative talent that can be matched up and packaged in any way necessary to serve a specific project no matter its size or location.

"We can go into these markets in middle America and open up these avenues that were perhaps unexplored before, so that a director or a production company or an animation company like SPILLT, who is known very well in the commercial industry in Denver, could be introduced to small boutique agencies in Minneapolis and Miami and Atlanta and Charlotte," she says.

Unlike a traditional representative, the Republic's process is non-exclusive. Projects seeking to tap into its stable of talent pay a nominal search fee and, if they hire out of that search, a commission to The Republic. "We're like brokers," says Bryan. "Ad agencies can come to us and we can put together as many or as few of the pieces as they need. And our reach is vast because we work in the cloud. So whether it's animation, or direction or post or whatever, we have people all over the country that we can bring in."

The process of applying to The Republic is open to anyone who wishes to submit, but only applicants that show they can reliably produce quality work are accepted. "Not everyone, honestly, is invited in," says Bryan. "We want to make sure we are offering the most nimble, flexible options that the country has to offer."

Ryan Bramwell, creative director at SPILLT, says the increasing demand for animation in advertising across the board makes The Republic an ideal way for the company to expand its reach into new markets and complement its established sales avenues.



"The whole premise of SPILLT is to be collaborative with other production companies, to not stand on our own but to use other companies, other talents, to create the best

products," says Bramwell. "I'm a firm believer of working where you want to work and living where you want to live, so it fell right into line and I personally believe it's going to be one of the ways to give smaller companies like ourselves a chance to compete on top-tier projects."

The spot SPILLT animated for the Republic itself is an example of the growing opportunities for animation in the advertising field for both talented freelancers as well as boutique studios thanks in part to the spread of technology and animation's ability to tell complex stories quickly.

"There's a whole new world quickly opening up for these smaller budgeted, quick turnaround animation jobs," says Bramwell. "On the large scale sort of things, animation comes in when it needs to, but I think for the more utilitarian needs we're going to see more and more animation to tell a story quick and catch

Images from SPILLT's spot for the launch of The Republic Collective.



the public's eye."

"People that are talented and able to deal with what we term as regional budgets, they're special," says Levy. "We need someone who's able to go in on these smaller jobs and be a little more flexible because they don't have the overhead. SPILLT doesn't have the overhead that I think those giant animation companies would have. So we seek out companies in the smaller niche animation market so they can come in and take some of these smaller jobs."

Again, the SPILLT ad for The Republic is cited as an example. Bramwell says he and two students from the Savannah School of Art designed and animated the video.

"It's kind of in the spirit of The Republic itself, allowing these artists who normally wouldn't have a chance to do a video like this the chance to let them do it and give them a chance to shine," he says. ♦





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# Girl Talks Like a Dude

Actress Colleen Clinkenbeard provides the voice behind *One Piece* tough guy Monkey D. Luffy.  
By Charles Solomon

**M**onkey D. Luffy (rhymes, appropriately, with “goofy”), the hero of the hit anime series *One Piece*, is immediately recognizable by his straw hat, ear-to-ear grin, skinny limbs and raspy voice.

That scratchy baritone, which sounds like he gargled with Comet by mistake, is provided not by an actor projecting machismo, but by Colleen Clinkenbeard, one of the busiest voice actresses, line producers and ADR directors in the country.

Anime fans also know Clinkenbeard as Erza Scarlet in *Fairy Tail*, Riza Hawkeye in *Fullmetal Alchemist* and Rachel Moore in *Case Closed*, but Luffy is her most popular character. Clinkenbeard talked about her work and cross-gender voices in a recent interview from the FUNimation Studio in Flower Mound, Texas.

After graduating from college, she says she “came back to my home town in Texas to try to earn some money before I moved to New York to make it on Broadway.” A friend introduced her to voice acting and her career took off.

Although she had done a male voice previously, Clinkenbeard planned to audition for one of the female characters in *One Piece*. “Director Mike McFarland had heard me playing that male role, so he decided to audition me for Luffy,” she says. “It was exciting and kind of terrifying, but I don’t think I’ve wanted a part as much before or since.”

With his goliwog face, scrawny body and outsized feet, Luffy is hardly a matinee idol. But Clinkenbeard insists that doesn’t detract from his charm. “You want to play the fun role, the role that gets to do the most exciting range of things,” she says. “To play a boy-hero who is funny and stupid, but who also has dramatic moments – that’s as good as it gets.”

Fans on both sides of the Pacific agree. When Eiichiro Oda began the *One Piece* manga, he set out to create the story he wanted to read as a boy. It proved to be a story others wanted to read – and see. There are more than 345 million volumes of the manga in print. The TV series ran for more than 600 episodes (with more in the works) and spun off 12 theatrical features. It’s one of the fastest growing anime franchises in America, with more than 26 million episodes streaming each month.

When Clinkenbeard talks about Luffy, she



punches an occasional word in his voice and with his trademark enthusiasm.

“Male voice actors lower their voices to do the gruff-sounding roles: Luffy’s voice comes from the same place, I just have to lower it more and put it at that gravely place in my throat,” she says. “It’s playing around with the mechanism in your throat. That’s part of what’s fun about voice acting – you don’t get to do that kind of experimenting if you’re on camera or in the theater, but with voice acting, you can be anyone that you can sound like.”

Because he ate the accursed Gum-Gum Fruit, Luffy’s limbs can stretch beyond anything Elastigirl ever imagined. He uses this ability to launch himself over walls, inflate himself into a balloon and pound the *sushi out of villains*. The fights and transformations require Clinkenbeard to suggest violent physical action with her voice, but if she moves too much, she’ll go off mic and spoil the take.

“Director Justin Cook had to teach me how to make all of those fighting sounds without actually making the motions,” she says: “It has a lot to do with diaphragm control and energy, but it’s become second nature. Right now, I’m pregnant and I can do Luffy while sitting in a chair, relaxed.”

As the captain of the Straw Hat Pirates,



Colleen Clinkenbeard

Luffy is fanatically devoted to his mates, and will go to any lengths to save them when they’re in trouble. But he’s clearly not the sharpest sabre in the deadman’s chest. When needle-nosed crewman Usopp poses as a masked super-hero, Luffy gapes at him with a fanboy’s awe.

“The rhythms of Luffy’s speech come from the fact that he doesn’t think: Everything is a little bit confused or overly happy,” Clinkenbeard says. “There’s

not a lot of layers to anything he says, which is very different from almost every female character I’ve played.”

“I love him not realizing Usopp has the mask on – he never learns, which is a huge part of his charm,” she says. “Once, he was listening to all the characters describe a plan to him: When we go in there, this is what we’re going to do. Luffy says, ‘Got it!’ I turned to the director at the end of the take and asked, ‘Do I got it?’ He said, ‘You don’t got it!’ I knew Luffy was going to go blasting in!”

Clinkenbeard is a popular guest at anime conventions, where *One Piece* fans want their hero to speak to them. “By now most people know I’m Luffy,” she concludes. “But it’s fun to have people be amazed that you’re the one who made those sounds – it kind of strokes the voice actor ego.” ♦

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# Fresh Spring Releases

Thaw out with *Frozen*, *The Nut Job*, an epic *Desolation of Smaug* set or boogie with Baloo in *The Jungle Book 2*. by Mercedes Milligan

## Frozen

[Disney, \$29.99]

Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee's magical, musical, Academy Award-winning winter adventure has hit the right note with critics and audiences around the world, and now you'll never have to "Let It Go!" In case you've been stranded on a desert island, *Frozen* centers on two royal sisters: free spirited idealist Anna (Kristen Bell) and her serious-minded sister, Elsa (Idina Menzel), whose se-

cret powers to create ice and snow go haywire, sending her into the wilderness and dooming the kingdom to eternal winter. It's up to Anna to find her (with help from mountain man Kristoff, his reindeer Sven and a talking snowman) and convince her to return and reverse the curse.

The DVD set includes some very cool (ha) bonus features: the Mickey Mouse short *Get A Horse!*, multi-language music videos for the end credit version of "Let It Go" (Demi Lovato's

English, Martina Stoessel's Spanish & Italian, Marsha Milan's Malaysian) and *Frozen* teaser trailer. The Blu-ray/DVD combo (\$44.99) is even *chiller* (ha!), adding on *The Making of Frozen*, *D'frosted: Disney's Journey from Hans Christian Andersen to Frozen* and four deleted scenes with intros from Buck and Lee. It's *snow* joke, you'd be a *flake* to miss out on this! (Ha ... ha?)

[Release date: March 18]



## The Nut Job

[Universal, \$29.98]

On the indie feature side, get a taste of Peter Lepeniotis' squirrelly heist flick produced by Canada's Toonbox and Korea's Redrover. The critter caper centers on a squirrel named Surly (Will Arnett), whose crafty plan to steal nuts from a human

shop for his winter stash is made more complicated when he finds out the place is owned by ruthless bank robbers. It's up to Surly and his parkland pals to foil the criminals and save the town – no nuts, no glory.

The CG film also features the voices of Brendan Fraser, Gabriel Iglesias, Jeff Dunham, Liam Neeson,

Maya Rudolph and Katherine Heigl. The DVD version includes extra animated shorts, or opt for the Blu-ray or Blu-ray 3D combo packs (\$34.98, \$49.98) and get additional deleted scenes, storyboards and *The Great Nut Heist*. If you're a fan of sassy urban wildlife, these sets are worth shelling out for.



## The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug

[Warner, \$28.98]

Tolkienites, rejoice! The second installment of Peter Jackson's epic adaptation of *The Hobbit* comes home this month in all its magic-wielding, sword-swinging, beard-grooming glory. The film continues the adventure of Bilbo Baggins (Martin Freeman), Gandalf (Ian McKellen), Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage) and his band of dwarves as they fight their way past a magical shape-changer and giant forest spiders to confront

the terrible, gold-hoarding dragon Smaug (voiced by Benedict Cumberbatch, animated by WETA) and restore the underground realm of the King Under the Mountain. Evangeline Lilly, Lee Pace, Luke Evans, Stephen Fry, Ken Stott, James Nesbitt and Orlando Bloom also star in this thrilling fantasy.

To make the most of the visual spectacles and Kiwi scenery, we recommend the Blu-ray or Blu-ray 3D packs (\$35.99, \$44.95) which boast bonus features of legend: *Peter Jackson Invites You to the Set* (behind

the scenes of "In the Company of the Hobbit" & "All in a Day's Work"), Production Videos, *New Zealand: Home of Middle-earth, Part 2* and a music video for Ed Sheeran's theme song, "I See Fire." If you truly want to be King Under the Mountain (or King of Mom's Basement, or Lord of the LARPer's, or whatever) try to snag the awesome Limited Edition set which includes two Noble Collection "Gates of Erebor" replica bookends and will only see 25,000 units hit U.S. retailers. Truly, a treasure worthy of a dragon's lair.

[Release date: April 8]



## The Jungle Book 2

[Disney, \$29.99]

And topping our "What the heck can I get my niece/nephew/friend's kid for their birthday" list is this 2003 sequel romp from DisneyToon Studios, directed by Steve Trenbirth and starring Haley Joel Osment (Mowgli), John Goodman (Baloo) and Mae Whitman (Shanti). The

follow-up to the 1967 classic finds Mowgli living in the "man-village" where he has a new best friend and even a little brother, but he still longs for his jungle pals Baloo the bear and Bagheera the panther. The man-cub runs off the jungle only to encounter his old nemesis: Shere Khan.

The DVD will purportedly offer some deleted scenes, as will the

two-disc Blu-ray/DVD set (\$36.99). Most Disney fans wouldn't consider this flick one of the bare necessities of their collections, but it is a fun, musical romp that will keep less discerning kiddos entertained. And come on, John Goodman is playing the role he was born for.

[Release date: March 18]

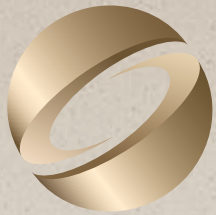




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